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The Mills
of God

The Mills of God

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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"HOMELY WORDS FOR LIFE'S WAYFARERS," "PLAIN SPOKEN
SERMONS," ETC. ETC.

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WILLIAM D. D. D.
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TO
THE DEAR MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
THESE SERMONS ARE LOVINGLY
DEDICATED

Contents

Advent

1.—"THE MILLS OF GOD"	PAGE 1
---------------------------------	-----------

2 PETER iii. 3, 4

There shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation

2.—THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES AFTER DEATH	11
---	----

GEN. xxxii. 17

Whither goest thou?

3.—HASTY JUDGMENTS	19
------------------------------	----

1 COR. iv. 5

Therefore judge nothing before the time till the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts

4.—DANGEROUS ADVICE	27
-------------------------------	----

1 SAM. iii. 5

And he said, I called not : lie down again

Christmas

	PAGE
5.—THE SADNESS OF CHRISTMAS	35

ST. JOHN i. 11

He came unto His own, and His own received him not

End of the Year

6.—THE END OF TIME	43
------------------------------	----

REV. x. 5-6

And the angel . . . swore by Him that liveth for ever and
ever . . . that there should be time no longer

Lent

7.—THE MINISTRY OF JUDAS	51
------------------------------------	----

ST. MATT. x. 4

And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him

8.—THE MOTIVES OF JUDAS	60
-----------------------------------	----

ST. JOHN xii. 4-6

Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's
son, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment
sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This
he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a
thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein

9.—"THE REWARD OF INIQUITY"	69
---------------------------------------	----

ST. MATT. xxvi. 14-15

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto
the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me,
and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with
him for thirty pieces of silver

Contents

ix

	PAGE
10.—THE ISOLATION OF JUDAS	77

ST. MATT. xxvii. 3-4

Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that

11.—"TO HIS OWN PLACE"	86
----------------------------------	----

ST. MATT. xxvii. 5

And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself

Palm Sunday

12.—THE DAY OF EXCITEMENT	93
-------------------------------------	----

ST. MATT. xxi. 9

And the multitudes that went before and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest

Good Friday

13.—THE RETURN FROM CALVARY	100
---------------------------------------	-----

ST. LUKE xxiii. 48

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned

Easter Day

14.—"I MYSELF"	107
--------------------------	-----

ST. LUKE xxiv. 39

It is I myself: handle Me, and see

Whit Sunday

	PAGE
15.—"POWER FROM ON HIGH"	114

ST. LUKE xxiv. 49

Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you : but
tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with
power from on high

General

16.—PILATE'S QUESTION	122
---------------------------------	-----

ST. JOHN xviii. 38

Pilate saith unto Him, What is Truth ?

17.—A SOCIETY CONUNDRUM	129
-----------------------------------	-----

ST. JOHN xviii. 38

Pilate saith unto Him, What is Truth ?

18.—THE BETTER WAY	136
------------------------------	-----

1 SAMUEL xv. 22

To obey is better than sacrifice

19.—A GRUDGING SUBMISSION	142
-------------------------------------	-----

NUMBERS xxii. 34

And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have
sinned ; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against
me : Now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back
again

20.—WHAT "GETTING BACK AGAIN" MEANS	148
---	-----

NUMBERS xxii. 34

I have sinned . . . now therefore . . . I will get me back
again

Contents

xi

PAGE

21.—THE IMPERISHABLE PAST	155
-------------------------------------	-----

EZEK. xvi. 61

Then thou shalt remember

22.—THE STRONG MAN'S WEAKNESS	161
---	-----

ST. JOHN xiii. 37

Peter said unto Him, Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?

I will lay down my life for Thy sake

23.—LOOKING UP TO GOD	169
---------------------------------	-----

PSALM v. 3

I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up

24.—THE DUTY OF PRAYER	176
----------------------------------	-----

ST. LUKE xviii. 1

Men ought always to pray

25.—THE SEA-LESS SHORE	184
----------------------------------	-----

REV. xxi. 1

And there was no more sea

Harvest Festival

26.—"THE FEAST OF HARVEST"	192
--------------------------------------	-----

EXODUS xxiii. 15, 16

Thou shalt keep . . . the feast of harvest

For a Wedding

	PAGE
27.—“ THE HOLY ESTATE OF MATRIMONY ” .	200

Funeral

28.—“ CONCERNING THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP ”	203
--	-----

1 THESS. iv. 13

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning
them which are asleep

Sermon I

“THE MILLS OF GOD”

(Advent Sunday)

2 PETER iii. 3, 4

There shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation.

“THE mills of God grind slowly”; and therefore the scoffer will scoff as long as the world shall last. God’s patience makes his scoffing safe.

There is a strange irony in it all! The scoffer deriding and blaspheming the patience and long-suffering which alone make his very existence possible. Even as the anarchist raves against, and is all for pulling down, the power and authority which allow him to declare himself an anarchist at all—the law and order which alone protect him against the mob, which, left to itself, would make a speedy end of him—so the scoffer may safely

ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” seeing that “the mills of God grind slowly,” and that even his ravings and blasphemies cannot hasten “the times and the seasons which God hath put in His own power,” or exhaust the patience of the Almighty.

It is the easiest thing in the world, my brethren, to scoff. And in these days of exaggerated licence of speech it would seem to be a perfectly safe thing to scoff at anything and anybody; while scoffing at religion has always been a favourite amusement with some. It is one way of getting talked about, and it is an easy way of winning a cheap notoriety. For whenever the scoffer opens his mouth he is sure to find some who will be ready, open-mouthed, to listen to him, and who will go away with the idea that here you have a very daring, original, and vigorous thinker. And this especially if he be (as he often is) a *fluent* scoffer, and if he have (as he often has) a witty, incisive way of putting things, and the knack of raising a laugh.

All scoffers cannot, indeed, do that; but any one can scoff. And so the great fraternity of scoffers is a world-wide one. Wherever you go, east and west, north and south, you may meet members of the brotherhood. In railway carriages and on ocean steamers; on western prairies and on

eastern plains ; in the smoking-room of the club, and in the tap-room of the village ale-house, you may hear them propounding, to their own great satisfaction and to the admiration of certain of their hearers, their profound theological conundrums.

And it is not only a very large fraternity, but it is also a remarkably mixed one ! It includes members as wide as the poles asunder in rank and circumstances, in tastes and pursuits—people hopelessly divided on politics and on all social questions, without one idea in common on old age pensions or an eight hours’ day ; on employers’ liabilities or on trades combinations—sworn and bitter foes even, and without agreement on one single point except this—to scoff at religion !

They cannot scoff at life, for life is a fact—but they scoff at high ideals of life. They cannot scoff at death, for death is a fact—but they scoff at the thought of a life after death ; at the doctrine of future retribution or reward. They cannot deny the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world, for that is an historical fact, and a landmark in the very reckoning of time—but they scoff at the teaching of a Second Advent ; and we need not wonder at it.

We need not wonder at it, I say, and if you think

a moment you will see why. *Who* are the people who scoffingly cry, “Where is the promise of His coming?” They are men “who walk after their own lusts!” Now I cannot imagine any one to whom the doctrine of the Second Advent and Judgment to come, must needs be more unwelcome and more intolerable than to the man who walks after his own lusts—the man without an ideal!—the do-as-you-like, live-as-you-please scoffer. If ever there was a case of the wish being father to the thought, it is the case of the man who denies the Second Coming of Christ, because he has every reason to dread that coming. This is the man whom we should expect to hear asking, “Where is the promise of His coming?”

Yes, and that is the sort of man who not only obtains a hearing and much applause from those like-minded with him, but who even succeeds in impressing, painfully, certain earnest but feeble and weak-kneed Christians; who imagine that because the scoffer boldly questions the doctrine, that therefore the whole fabric of Christianity is being shaken to its very foundations.

Well now, let these just consider, first of all, the *character* of those who thus attempt to give a lead on this subject. Are they the kind of people we are prepared to follow? Remember, “Scoffers

walking after their own lusts” are those who, given a free hand, would make life and property unsafe, and the world absolutely unfit to live in.

And, secondly, let them consider that these scoffers are also foolish and illogical chatterers.

Now it may be a safe thing to scoff, but it is not always wise or safe to *give reasons* for one’s scoffing, and to produce arguments in support of them. Now this is what these scoffers have done in this case. And what is the argument they produce against the doctrine of the Second Advent? “Why,” they say, “since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation!” Could anything be feebler? For that just means this—that because something has never happened yet, it follows that it never will, and never can, happen.

I think we may let *that* “argument” severely alone. Nevertheless, in spite of everything, the scoffer goes on his foolish, flippant, illogical way—preaching his own gospel of plunder and lust, and, if needs be, murder. “Why not?” he says; “There is nothing after this life; therefore if you are wise you will take all you can, only do not let yourself be taken!”

And all this time

The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.

The scoffer has his day—but after the day, “ the night cometh ”—after boasting and blasphemy in the noon-tide, the night of terror and despair.

“ Where is the promise of His coming ? ” But even the believer has his times of doubt and sorrow, bitterness of heart and heaviness of spirit. He, too, sometimes echoes, “ Where ? ” If God is in His Heaven, then why does He not help, why does He not punish ? The poor cry for bread, and their cry remains unheard. The weak appeal against the injustice and the cruelty of their oppressors, and their wrongs remain unredressed. The sweater robs his hapless victims of health and life in one part of the great city, and in another part he builds a church or endows a charity. Vice lifts its head in our midst, unashamed ; the wicked flourish, and virtue goes unrewarded. Oh ! the cruelty of it all ! the irony, and the grim humour of it all ! Oh ! the inequalities of life ! the tragedies of life ! the pathos of life !

And then the child of God himself grows restless and impatient, full of doubts, and full of fears. Why does not God punish, and that immediately ? How long, O Lord, how long shall evil abound, and the scoffer scoff ?

And all the time

The mills of God grind slowly !

We are restless, and fearful, and impatient, because we measure the Infinite by the standard of the finite ; and we associate months, and days, and years with His great plan Who knows no time ; with Whom “ one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

And after all, what is God’s impenetrable calm, His inexhaustible patience and divine restraint but the very strongest proof of His might, and majesty, and power ? Wherever you have boundless might, and an inexhaustible reserve of power, there you will always find immovable calm and infinite patience. It is the patience of conscious strength.

The mills of earthly justice grind slowly too. Do not forget that. In every country where law and order are firmly established, where a stable government conducts the affairs of a nation, there you will find the supreme power of this law—a calm, patient, self-restrained power—conscious of its own strength ; slow to punish, it may be, but terrible in its punishment when the day of grace is past.

Contrast with the calm, restrained, irresistible action of established law and order, the swift and terrible working of mob-law. Lynching is a form of punishment, swift as it is awful ; but does any civilised nation desire to see lynch-law established in its midst ? Is it not a sign of the weakness and

helplessness of the law to restrain men's passions? Does it not produce a feeling of distrust, insecurity, and restlessness? Naturally—for it is the triumph of violence and disorder over established law and authority.

In the midst of all the sadness of that terrible tragedy enacted in the United States in the autumn of 1901 there was one thing that stood out in splendid relief—and that was the magnificent calm and strong restraint shown by the American people in their hour of trial. It was the vindication of the power of the law to deal with and to punish the assassin, without having its machinery for one moment disturbed or thrown out of gear.

Nothing could have served more completely to show up the grotesque absurdity as well as the wickedness of the anarchist position than the sight of the assassin (who, as the enemy of all established law and authority had struck down the President, who in his own person symbolised these things), himself protected by that very same law and order from the violence of the mob which would have torn him to pieces; fairly tried, justly sentenced, and then, and not till then, suffering the extreme penalty of the law.

But now let us imagine for a moment some Being living in the world at that time and witnessing

the tragedy—a Being as far removed from man in intelligence and knowledge as man is removed from the Creator. To this Being moments and seconds are what years and centuries are to us. Well, he witnesses the horrible deed. He waits, and no judgment overtakes the murderer. The time that elapses after it all—the time taken up in the prisoner’s trial, condemnation and execution—a few weeks to us, are to him interminable æons. What is the result? Why, he cries out and complains that the murderer goes unpunished. Nothing is done to him—nothing will ever be done! The mills of man’s justice grind so slowly for this being that he cannot believe they are in motion at all. As our ways and our reckonings are to this one, so are God’s ways, and decrees, and plans to us.

Brethren, God’s plans are worked out calmly, and with infinite patience, dignity, and power. Because punishment does not come at once it does not follow that it will never come. Because Christ’s coming is delayed, it does not follow that the doctrine is a myth. God is taking note of the world’s history, of the history of individual souls. Nothing is unobserved by Him, nothing is forgotten. Our thoughts, our words, our actions, all these are noted in His Book. And as our

lives have been, so will our reward or our punishment be.

The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small ;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all.

Sermon II

THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES AFTER DEATH

(Second Sunday in Advent)

GEN. xxxii. 17

Whither goest thou ?

IT is inevitable that the world in which we live should bulk large in our lives ; it must, of necessity, occupy a very considerable place in our thoughts, and plans, and calculations. It is no easy matter to dissociate the world from those countless details of life which go to make up the sum-total of our daily existence.

How, indeed, could it be otherwise ? We live in the world (and if we are disappointed and dissatisfied with it, there is no other world to which we can transport ourselves, and still continue our earthly existence), our work lies here ; here we have to earn our daily bread. It is in the world

12 The First Five Minutes after Death

we form all our dearest earthly ties ; in which we learn all that is good as well as all that is evil. In the world we find our joys and our recreations ; and in the world we experience our sorrows and our trials.

The world is ever present with us ; it is a part of our very existence. From the day we were born, we have opened our eyes every morning and closed them every night upon the world in which we live and move and have our being. And the result of it all is that we find it hard to realise that this state of things will one day cease, and that we shall not go on living in the world for ever.

The world is ever present with us ; and it is only natural therefore that we should set ourselves to make the world in which we live as tolerable as we may. Thus we eagerly welcome everything that conduces to our comfort and happiness in the world ; we very quickly resent and complain of everything that makes life hard to bear. And how many and how varied are the conditions (and the accidents even) which contribute to our happiness or our discomfort ; and what gigantic proportions they assume, a very little reflection will serve to show. Thus, with one man it is the weather that either exhilarates or depresses him. With another it is the state of the stock market. With

The First Five Minutes after Death 13

a third it is the news that appears in the morning paper, or it is the contents of the morning post-bag. With yet another it is the presence of those about him whom he loves best in the world; or it is the dreary blank that their absence makes, and the ache that comes with "the wild regret of the last good-bye."

And so the years pass over our heads—and according to circumstances, and the conditions amid which we are living, we are lifted up or we are cast down. Things that happen, or that fail to happen, mean so much to us, matter so much, make such an enormous difference to us! And again, the result is that we find it hard to realise that all these conditions and influences affect or interest us only for a time; and that, at last, there comes a day when, as far as we are concerned, things that meant so much, mattered so much, mean nothing at all, and matter not in the very smallest degree—the day in which the world will go on just as it has ever done, but when *we* shall have no part or lot in it.

Men will walk and sleep, and work and rest, and buy and sell. The place in which we used to live, will look as it always looked. There will be seen and heard the old familiar sights and sounds of daily labour, and amusement, and business,

14 The First Five Minutes after Death

and enterprise. The daily paper will appear as usual ; there will be the usual delivery of the daily post. Some event, perhaps, will be announced, so terrible that it will startle the universe ; some tragedy that will stagger humanity. But *we* shall not be startled by it—*we* shall not be affected. None of these things will matter any longer to us. What *will* matter ?

Something else will—a something about which, perhaps, we have never troubled ourselves to think. Time will be over for us ! Eternity will have begun ! What will that Eternity be to us ? What is that future to which we are all pressing on ? “ *Whither goest thou ?* ”

Have you ever thought how wide and impassable is the gulf fixed between the conditions under which many a soul is living to-day, and those under which it was living yesterday ? Yesterday you passed by a house, and you knew at once that some one was lying there dangerously ill. Straw had been laid down in the streets ; precautions had been taken to procure peace and quiet for the life that was hanging by a thread. These things mattered so much to the sufferer yesterday. To-day all that is changed. Nothing (nothing *earthly*, I mean) matters now ! You may take away the straw ; you may unmuffle the knocker of the

The First Five Minutes after Death 15

street door. The roar of all the traffic in the world cannot disturb the sleeper now.

What matters now? Well, one thing—and only one!—namely, how far that soul was prepared, or unprepared, for the journey upon which it has gone, and for the great change that has come to-day.

Whither goest thou? Some of you never give this matter a thought. To-day I want to put it to you; to get you to look facts in the face. Ninety-nine times you may thrust it obstinately away—but the hundredth time you will have to face it!

“Whither goest thou?” In our hospital here, a few weeks ago, was a young soldier of the Imperial Yeomanry, invalided home from South Africa. He was detained for a time, and then came the glad day of his discharge from hospital. If you had met him, as I did, on the morning of that day so long looked forward to, as he walked happily about the wards and corridors, and if you had said to him “Well, what now? Where are you going?” he would have answered, with the glad look in his face of one who has long been separated from home and loved ones, “Why, I am going *out* to-day. I am going home!” And half an hour later he had gone—“out.” Out, not in the sense he meant, poor lad—not out of hospital—out to the railway station—out on the homeward

16 The First Five Minutes after Death

journey of his dreams—but out into the great, wide, limitless unknown—out into the Eternity that awaits us all. “I am going home” he had been saying to the others, that morning. And I pray God that it may have been even as he said—not, indeed, to that home where the mother, awaited her dear boy’s home-coming, but to his Father’s Home of many mansions—“Home, where no shadows fall.”

“Whither goest thou?” After all, the answer to that question is the same for every one of us. “Whither goest thou?” “I go to the God who gave me life, and who now bids me yield it up again. To the God who sent me into the world to do His will, and who now calls me home again. Who gave me my work to do, and now bids me lay it down again.”

It is true of us, every one. But what will that going forth into the dim, mysterious, limitless unknown be like? The failure of the faculties; the roar in the ears as the roar of the distant sea; the slipping of the cable, and the launching out upon the great wide ocean. And then, silence! a silence that may be felt! The world left behind; the soul alone with its God—and *the first five minutes after death!* What will it all be like? That depends upon our preparation, or our want of preparation, for it when it comes.

The First Five Minutes after Death 17

Now, you will go away presently, and you will be saying, some of you, "That was an uncomfortable quarter of an hour! What a morbid, horrible, creepy sort of sermon!" And some of you will turn it all aside, with a sorry jest; and some of you will say, "Well, it was right enough, it was true enough, what he said." But will you do any more than that? I don't want to make your flesh creep. I *do* want you to answer this question as to God, who comes to you, and takes you apart, and says, "Whither goest thou?"

Ah! I wonder indeed where you are going—what you have settled to do, this very day—this Sunday evening! Have you carried out your plans, and kept appointments, and visited places you cannot think of without shame, and are you going to do these things again to-day? Well, my brother, why should you? Why should you do these things again? If you have already planned anything of the sort, then as you go out this evening, and God meets you and says, "Whither goest thou?" how will you answer Him?

Don't do it, my brother! Don't go there! Believe me, five years, fifty years, of sinful indulgence, is not going to compensate you for all that you will see, and hear, and learn, and know, in the first five minutes after death!

18 The First Five Minutes after Death

Think of it, for “the time is short,” and life will soon be ended, and all the old familiar routine of life will be over. The last “fatigue,” the last guard and picquet, the last “orderly room call,” the last inspection, the last parade, the last answering of your name—and then, the great Inspection by the Great Commander up above, and the roll called by God’s Angel ! The end will have come—your soldiering will be for ever over ; the “Last Post ” sounded, and then—sleep, silence, death ! “Whither goest thou ? ”

Sermon III

HASTY JUDGMENTS

(Third Sunday in Advent)

I COR. iv. 5

Therefore judge nothing before the time till the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.

THE critical faculty is innate in man. He is born with it. There is a sense in which we can no more help judging than we can help breathing. Whenever we see or hear anything for the first time, we instinctively review it. That is the first thing we do. In less time than it takes to tell, we pass it before the bar of our individual taste and judgment. We *criticise* it.

We stand before a picture or a piece of sculpture; our attention is called to a famous bridge, or some well-known building; and the very first thing we do is to criticise it. Our criticism may be quite worthless. Of art we may be utterly ignorant—

we may know nothing about painting or sculpture ; we may not even know the meaning of such terms as spandrils and finials, crockets and capitals. But we *do* know whether we like a thing when we see it, or whether we do not ; whether it appeals to us, or whether it fails to make the very slightest impression on us. And so we pass our judgment on the painting or the statue, the bridge or the building. According to our own views and tastes, our capabilities or our limitations, we *criticise* it. We go to the theatre, we take up a novel, we hear a sermon, or we read the report of somebody's speech, and the very first thing we instinctively do, in each case, is to criticise. I do not mean that our criticism is necessarily unkind or ill-natured, or that in these matters again we are in the least qualified to judge. But judge we do, none the less, simply because the critical faculty is there. God has given it to us, and we cannot help exercising it. And so, on persons, and places, and objects ; on all manner of subjects, from grave political, social or religious questions, down to the quality of a dinner, or the cut of a coat, we are for ever passing judgment.

But while every God-given faculty is thus meant to be exercised ; while each has its own proper uses—so each has also its limitations. There is

danger attached to each, arising out of the temptation to exercise the faculty wrongfully, and so to abuse it. Such criticisms as I have spoken of, criticisms which begin and end with ourselves—by which we determine whether some person or place or thing appeals to us as individuals, or not—these are not only perfectly natural, but (kept within due bounds) they are also perfectly innocent. Danger begins when the critical faculty is abused, when we begin to judge hastily, rashly, unkindly, to the hurt and damage of others. It is abused when we overstep the limits within which we are intended to exercise it ; when we begin to pass judgment on those whom it is in no way our province to judge ; when, on very imperfect information and scanty knowledge, we hastily judge the actions (or, worse still, the motives) of our neighbours.

It is this *abuse* of the power which God has given us that our blessed Lord condemns in the words, “ Judge not, that ye be not judged,” and against which the Apostle warns us when he writes, “ Therefore judge nothing before the time.”

It is this—the habit of *censoriousness*—the fault-finding harsh-judging spirit—against which the Apostle’s voice is raised. And not without a cause surely, for it is an odious spirit. I know few things

more productive of unhappiness in the world ; few things which more commonly give rise to family jars, and disputings, and unpleasantnesses ; few things which more effectually take the pleasure out of social intercourse, and break in upon the harmony of life, than the censorious habit and temper.

Look at it how you will, it is an unlovely unattractive temper. It reveals, in the first place, *a sad lack of self-knowledge* in those who give way to it. And that is a more serious thing than at first sight may appear. Self-knowledge invariably makes men humble, gentle, pitiful, merciful to others—the want of it often makes them harsh and cruel. Have you not noticed how it is the sins they are themselves most prone to, that people most severely condemn in others? As in the old fable, the wolf preached against sheep stealing, so you will see men set themselves to hunt down in others those sins which they very gladly shelter in themselves. None are more ready to despise a want of sense in others, than those who have a small share of wit themselves. “God help the fool !” used to be a favourite saying of one Sedley, a well-known simpleton of his day.

Censoriousness springs not from the Divine, but from the evil element of our nature. Some

men exercise it under the form of a blunt, plain-speaking manner. Well, there is nothing so blunt as a bull, but a bull is not usually thought to be a good thing to let loose in a crowded thoroughfare, or in society.

Instead of fault-finding—instead of looking for faults, exposing and harshly judging the faults of our neighbours—is it not a more gracious and blessed thing to be ready to assist them to *overcome* their faults? But I do not believe we shall ever effectually help others in this way till we have learnt to know ourselves.

“It is only,” says a writer, “when we have wrestled with and overcome our own besetting sin, that we have the insight and the tact to direct others how to overcome theirs. Massillon, the great French preacher, was once asked where he obtained his profound knowledge of the world and of the human passions, and his skill in solving religious difficulties. ‘From my own heart,’ he replied. Hence the convicting pungency of his teaching, by which the careless courtiers of Versailles were impressed, and to which Louis XIV. himself bore witness. At the close of a sermon the King said to him, ‘I have heard several great orators, and been very much pleased with them; but every time I have heard

you, I have been very much displeased with myself.' ”

Then again, to look at it all in another way,—if there is one thing which more than another we resent when we find it in other people, it is *arrogance*. We cannot put up with people who “*take too much on themselves!*” They need putting down, we say, and we forthwith set about doing it. Well, that which makes censoriousness such an odious thing is this very fact that those who are guilty of it are guilty of taking too much upon themselves. They are meddling in matters which do not belong to them. Judgment, mark you, is God’s prerogative, and not man’s. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come.” People who forget this, like all people who exceed their powers and meddle in things they know nothing about, are sure to make a sad business of it.

We are warned then to “judge nothing before the time.” In this life we are surrounded by limitations and difficulties which make a just judgment of others almost an impossibility. We know only in part; and when, on imperfect evidence and scanty information, we set ourselves to judge, and judge harshly, this is judging “before the time”—and, depend upon it, such judgment will be one-sided, cruel, and unfair!

I have read of a broker in one of the Italian cities, whose strict economy brought upon him the reputation of miserliness. He lived plainly and poorly, and at his death thousands of his fellow citizens were ready to curse him. When his will was opened, however, it was found that his heart had long been touched with the sufferings of the poor in the city for lack of water. Springs there were none, and the public wells were bad. And so this broker had spent his life in accumulating a fortune that should be devoted to bringing, by an aqueduct from the neighbouring hills, streams that should pour abundantly into the public baths, and into the dwellings of the poor in the city. And he not only denied himself many of the comforts of life, but he toiled by day and by night, and bore much obloquy, that he might help and bless his fellow citizens. He is dead, but those streams pour their health into that city.

Ah! let us be patient, brethren—patient even with the obvious faults and failings of others. Let us remember that some of us are shielded by our environment, our tastes, the nature of our work and calling, from temptations which prove too strong for our fellow men. Let us ask ourselves what we should have done in their place!

Do not let us be ready and eager to criticise and

condemn others. "Take each man's censure, but reserve thy own," is wise advice.

The Day appointed by God for judgment is coming. That will be a day of many revelations—a day in which many an earthly judgment will be reversed. The self-satisfied, self-righteous Pharisees stood aloof from and despised the publicans and harlots, and yet the Saviour warned them that those same publicans and harlots would take precedence of them in the Kingdom of God.

For whom the heart of man shuts out,
Sometimes the Heart of God takes in ;
And fences them all round about
With silence—'mid the world's loud din.

From the fallible bar of human judgments there is, thank God, an appeal to a higher, infallible tribunal, even to God's own judgment-seat, "upon the farther shore."

There the tears of earth are dried,
There its hidden things are clear,
There the work of life is tried
By a juster Judge than here.

May we, who with light hearts have judged others "before the time," ourselves find mercy of the Lord in that Day.

We shall need it !

Sermon IV

DANGEROUS ADVICE

(Fourth Sunday in Advent)

I SAM. iii. 5

And he said, I called not : lie down again.

THIS was the advice given by an old man, with the weight of years resting upon him, and the experience of a long life behind him, to a mere child with his life still lying before him ; with all life's lessons yet to be learnt ; with all his experience yet to be bought.

Yet it was not, as, under the circumstances, we should expect it to be, the best advice that could have been given ; indeed, it was not even good sound advice.

Well, my brethren, it often happens thus. A man who, by his own personal piety and holiness, is eminently fitted to fill a high and sacred office, may yet be quite unfitted, from one cause or another,

to be a safe guide to and adviser of others, and more especially of his younger brethren.

It may be from a lack of sympathy, or it may be through some physical weakness which affects the play of the faculties, which blurs the mental vision and prevents the man from taking a wide bold grasp of things; it may be from infirmity of purpose, with all its consequent hesitancy and indecision; or it may be from even such a seemingly small thing as just a lack of imagination—but the result is the same. From one cause or another, it may and does happen that a man who is personally a good man enough, is not always a good counsellor and guide.

Now there is not the slightest doubt that Eli was a good man enough—a holy and humble man of heart—yet as a guide and instructor of the young he was a failure. He was a failure in his own home, and with his own children. His weak and foolish domestic rule had produced the very saddest results. His sons Hophni and Phinehas were living examples of his culpable remissness and weakness. Their shamelessly evil lives, their licentious habits, their glaring vices, had made the offering of the Lord to be abhorred of His people.

Eli, like so many weak people, meant well, but

acted foolishly. Thus he meant well, but advised foolishly when once and again he assured the child Samuel,—who had been awakened out of sleep by hearing his name distinctly called—that he was mistaken ; that he had been dreaming ; and bade him “go and lie down again.”

It was such easy, commonplace, unimaginative advice to give ! And it saved so much trouble ! Eli had not called the child, and therefore no one had called ! The only thing was to “go and lie down again.” I may be wrong in saying so, but I confess that it is just the sort of advice I should expect from Eli, at this particular period of his life. Remember, he had always been a weak, easy-going man. I should say that he had been one who all his life had hated trouble—a man without much imagination ; who would move in a groove ; and whom it would be very difficult to get out of that groove. Added to all this, he was now a very old man—in the extreme of age and weakness ; blind, and bowed down with years ; broken in spirit, and depressed with the knowledge of his own failures ; conscious of the terrible evils that had resulted from his own weak administration. The times were troubled times. God had ceased to reveal Himself to His people. “The word of the Lord was precious in those days ; there was no open vision.”

The old man was weary, and worn, and sad ; tired out, and longing for his rest. Hope was dead within him. Eagerness and anticipation had gone out of his life. The seeing of visions, the dreaming of dreams, were over for him. All such things lay far behind him now. His very senses and faculties were benumbed. Divine inspirations, calls from God, stirrings of the Spirit were hardly understood by him any longer. What was there in common between this old man with the blood moving so sluggishly in his veins, and the quick eager child, with his questionings and his hopefulness and his anticipations ? What can he say to him, what advice can he give him ? Only this—" Go and lie down again ! "

It is a pathetic picture enough. On the one side an awakened, eager soul, startled out of sleep ; wondering, anxious, ready to obey a clear behest— and, on the other side, a heavy, drowsy, sluggish one—way-worn and weary—a life out of which eagerness and hope have quite died ; unwilling to be disturbed, incapable of sympathising with enthusiasm and energy. To such an one the young, eager, hopeful child looks for guidance and advice, only to hear the repeated injunction, " Go and lie down again ! "

But if in the mouth of a good man this is mis-

taken, disappointing, unsound advice—in the mouth of a bad one it is positively vicious and dangerous. And it is common enough, God knows, to hear it given by such to newly-awakened souls in this world; lulling the deeply-stirred, uneasy conscience back again into a dull apathy and dangerous slumber. “Do not worry and fret yourself,” say these advisers; “just go and lie down again!”

It is the advice which the world, the flesh, and the devil would give us even now, as this solemn season draws to a close. I can imagine Satan, this very last Sunday in Advent, making one final effort to undo any good that, by the grace of God, has been effected in us, during these past three weeks. He would blot out any good impressions we may have received, he would destroy the force of any good words we may have heard or read, by assuring us that we have been quite unduly alarmed, and bidding us “go and lie down again!”

At the beginning of Advent, a call sounded in our ears full and clear. It was the call to repentance—the call to watchfulness and prayer; and for a time our hearts were stirred within us. But, as the days went on the call became less distinct, the voice that warned us almost died away. And whereas, at the beginning of Advent, we heard only a *warning* voice, now, at its close we hear a

reassuring voice, which says, "After all, you were unduly alarmed, you were foolishly disturbed. For what is there to be anxious and disturbed about? See! everything goes on as usual. The world goes on its regular course, and will go on. The sun shines, the birds sing. You are healthy, and prosperous, and active. What 'call' are you talking about? No one called. Do not be alarmed at shadows, but just 'go and lie down again!'"

That is the easy-going, commonplace, unimaginative advice the world (which prides itself on being, before all things, practical and un-emotional) is ready to give you about Advent wakings, and Advent teachings. When your soul is stirred within you, when the whisperings of conscience make you afraid, and you turn to the world for an explanation of these things, that is all the world has to say to you—"Go and lie down—don't be uneasy! Go and lie down again!"

The world is ever ready to quench the enthusiasm and the hopefulness of the eager, awakened soul—the soul that God has called to live and work for Him. "Now, do not make yourself conspicuous," says the world. "Do not find fault with the natural order of things. Why should you be alarmed at the state of society, for instance? You

are not responsible for it. You are not called upon to reform it. Then why disturb yourself? Go and lie down again!

God comes to a man who has been lying bound in the sad deep sleep of sin, and calls to him, and rouses him, and shows him the danger he is in. And that man seeks out a friend—a worldly, pleasure-loving one—and tells him all he feels; his anxiety, his uneasiness about himself, his dread of the future that awaits him,—and what is the answer he not infrequently gets? “My dear fellow, you should really see a doctor. You are run down and quite unstrung. You want a tonic. You should go away for a change. It is absurd to talk in this way; and it is just nerves and nothing else, depend upon it—all nerves! See a doctor, and get him to give you something to brace you up. You will be all right directly. This will all pass off. Meanwhile don’t worry, just take it easy, and forget all about it.” It is like Eli’s advice to Samuel, “Go and lie down again.”

Ah! how many a young eager fellow has had all the hopefulness, all the buoyancy, all the enthusiasm which God has kindled within him, crushed out by such devil’s counsel as that—has grown hard and cynical and cruel, and become at last a castaway! My brothers, never speak to

anxious, eager souls in that way. Never listen to advice like that from others. If you feel that God has called you, whatever you do, do not go and lie down again—but stand up to hear and to obey, with the willing response, “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth ! ”

Sermon V

THE SADNESS OF CHRISTMAS

(Christmas Day)

ST. JOHN i. 11

He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

“HE came unto His own!” And the joy-bells of Christmas, throughout the world, are ringing on and in glad commemoration of that Coming—stupendous as it was lowly—of God Incarnate to “His own,” to-day. “He came unto His own,” they are saying, the Christmas bells which awaken so many tender, sacred memories; with which are bound up so many glad associations of the days that are gone, and the years that are past. With hearts uplifted we listen to them, for in their sound we catch the echo of the Angel’s Song on the first Christmas night, “Glory to God in the highest,” and we hear again the “good tidings of great joy” made known to the shepherds of Bethlehem,

keeping watch under the wintry stars, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord."

But, even as they ring out with a joyous persistent reiteration their glad sweet message, "He came unto His own," there comes, mingling with the music of the bells,

All along the mighty ages,
All adown the solemn time,

another sound—an answering sound, equally persistent indeed, but not so gladsome—the burden of a melancholy refrain: "And His own received Him not."

It is well, my brethren, that we should hear *that* sound also. It is well that we should allow that sad refrain to sink deep into our hearts. For in all its startling nakedness that terrible fact stands out. From the hour of His Birth, when Jesus Christ was crowded out of the inn, in which there was "no room for Him," through the years of His Ministry, when, in His own world, He had not where to lay His Head; to the hour of His Death, when that sacred Head rested at last only on the hard rough pillow of the Cross—"His own received Him not."

But let us not imagine that that heavy charge lies at the door of the Jewish nation alone. From

the first Christmas Day down to this one which we are even now celebrating, history has gone on repeating itself ; so that to-day you may see thousands of people “keeping Christmas”—but it is Christmas without the Christ. And mingling with the sound of the merry bells, we may hear the burden of the sad refrain ; in the bitter mockery of many so-called Christmas festivities we may find it emphasised—“His own received Him not.” But, do you know, I do not think the words mean much to us as we hear them read in the Gospel for Christmas Day, or that we give them so much as a second thought. I am quite sure that we do not realise what terrible words they are, or understand that, in that one short sentence, we are reading the story of the wildest, saddest, most fateful national revolt that the world ever witnessed. But now, just consider—only seventy years after the Birth of Him whose own, in their blind infatuation, received Him not, but “crucified the Lord of Glory,” that nation had ceased to exist !

In all the history of the world, I do not think we find anything like this utter collapse, this sudden blotting out of a nation.

We look back to the first Christmas Day, and we see “a Jewish polity fully established. We see

Jerusalem with its great and magnificent Temple, the glory of the East, crowded with pilgrims from all parts of the world. We see Pharisees and Sadducees, Scribes, and the common people. Seventy years pass away—a very brief period in a nation's life—and we look again ; and the whole of that city of associations has vanished under one decisive blow.” The Temple is gone. Jerusalem is a heap of ruins. The whole Jewish polity has disappeared. There are no more processions of pilgrims, no more rival religious parties. There are many Jews still in the world, there are many Jews still in Palestine, but the *Jewish nation has ceased to exist !*

And as the night winds go moaning over that scene of desolation, once known as the Holy City, there seems to come a sighing and a wailing out of the darkness, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”

* * * * *

“He came unto His own !” And even as each recurring Christmas Day is a commemoration of that Coming, so is each recurrence in which Jesus Christ is not recognised by us, and given His due place in our commemoration, a repetition of that terrible rejection of Him, in Jerusalem of old—a

re-writing of that saddest sentence in the history of the world, "His own received Him not!"

For, mark you, Jesus Christ comes, as He came then, "to His own things." That is the meaning of the words in the original Greek, "He came *unto His own things*," as a rightful owner coming to his own house, and property, and lands—as a sovereign to the throne which is his by indisputable right—"and those who were of His own household received Him not."

Even so does He come now—"to His own things." The world which He created, and all that is in it; we ourselves, our lives, our talents, our time, our substance—these are "His own things"; and His is clearly the right to come and possess them all, as being His very own.

And so there arises at once the clear issue, the practical question, "Is His right recognised? Do we as a nation acknowledge it? Do we welcome our Master and our King, and gladly yield to Him His own?" Who will dare to say that we do?

To appropriate the Christmas Festival to our own use; to observe old Christmas customs; to ring the Church bells; to wish each "a merry Christmas"; to decorate our houses and our Churches; to get through a good deal of eating

and a good deal of drinking—this is not necessarily to recognise the Coming of the King. All this we may do without one loyal thought for Him. But do we find Him filling the place He has the right to fill in the nation's life and conscience? As He comes to "the things that are His own," do we, members of His own household, His own people, receive Him and honour Him as we never fail to receive, to recognise, to acclaim our own earthly Sovereign, King Edward VII., whenever and wherever *he* comes to his own?

Again I say, who will dare to say that we do? Who among us that has eyes to see and ears to hear can help noticing a state of things alarmingly the reverse? Who can fail to observe a marked and growing disinclination in the present day, to recognise Jesus Christ at all—an impatience of His claims—an attitude of insolent denial of His rights? We are daily getting to insist more and more openly upon our own rights only—our right to enjoy life to the uttermost in our own way, to have "a good time" in this world; to take our pleasures as we please—and to refuse to admit that God has any claim upon us, upon our time and our service at all.

Never, I believe, has pleasure seeking and pleasure taking grown to such a perfect passion

and frenzy as it has with us to-day. Six days in the week used to be sufficient for us, but *seven* days are reckoned quite insufficient now. Week in and week out—summer and winter—with a cynical contemptuous indifference to the claims of the Almighty on the one hand, and to the needs, physical and spiritual, of those who must slave and toil for the excitement-hunters on the other, that the round of pleasure may not for a single day be interrupted—the mad wild rush goes on. Sunday and weekday alike—hockey and “bridge,” tennis and croquet, luncheons at “Prince’s,” and luncheons on the river—Sunday golf, Sunday visiting, Sunday “at homes”—such are the times in which we live!

Never was wealth so ostentatiously displayed—expenditure so lavish—and never perhaps was its use so candidly selfish. And never was the poverty that lies at its doors more hideously grinding than it is to-day. And where does Christ come in, in this mad bewildering rush? What place has God in it all? Why, no place—and we know it. God is not wanted—and we have as much as told Him so. The wild excesses of the selfish rich on the one hand, and the incoherent ravings of the infidel orator in Battersea Park, for which those excesses are sometimes directly

responsible, on the other, each proclaim the same sad fact—"His own receive Him not!"

Well, do you suppose that such a state of things can go on for ever? Do you suppose that a day of reckoning will never come? Depend upon it, it will. Has France no lesson to teach us? Have we forgotten the French nobles and their selfish cry, "After us, the deluge!" Depend upon it, it is a mad state of things that will work its own revenge. To put it on the lowest ground, men and women cannot go on living at such high pressure without using up all their reserve force, and that means a sudden terrible break-up, a hideous collapse of body, soul and spirit, complete as it is sudden. Flesh and blood cannot stand such incessant wear and tear; and the hideous patching up, each day, of a jaded, used-up system, by a resort to drugs and stimulants is as unavailing as it is pathetic.

Let us pause awhile on this Christmas Day, on which Jesus Christ comes to us, and ask ourselves if we are willing to receive Him. Have we any wish to give Him the first place in our hearts as this day's honoured, welcome Guest? If we have no such wish, then Christmas Day becomes a mere mockery, Christmas festivities a burlesque. He comes to His own, and His own receive Him not.

Sermon VI

THE END OF TIME

(End of the Year)

REV. x. 5-6

And the angel . . . sware by Him that liveth for ever and
ever . . . that there should be time no longer.

To the business man "Time is money." He knows it ; and, in business hours, he will not thank you for taking up his time unnecessarily. For him, such waste spells loss.

To the idle, useless pleasure-seeker, Time is of no account. It is frequently a weariness to him, and he is bored to death when means fail him for "killing the time." It has no value in his eyes, and he has no compunction about wasting it. To the student, who needs time in which to carry out his investigations and researches, to work out his problems and to test his theories, Time is an invaluable ally. It is the great revealer of truths and fallacies.

To every wise man, Time is one of God's most precious gifts. From God's Hands he receives it ; as in His sight he thankfully and conscientiously saves and spends it.

To us all, if we did but realise it, Time is on the one hand a summons to repentance. "While there is yet time!" the fleeting moments seem to say to the impenitent. And, on the other hand, it is a call to patient faith and trust in God. "It is but for a time," is the message of the passing hours, amid the trials that beset us, the sorrows we endure.

Yet, in spite of all this, there is nothing that is so universally unheeded as the steady flight of time. We take that flight as a matter of course. It is the most natural thing in the world to see the sun rise and set every day. That Spring should glide into Summer, and Summer ripen into Autumn, and Autumn die into Winter, is merely what must happen while the world goes on. To get up in the morning ; to go about our work and our labour until the evening ; to lie down to sleep at night, and then to rise up the next morning, and go through the day's routine again, is all "in the day's work." It calls for no special notice from us. Most of us seldom—and some of us never—stop to reflect that the day that is gone, is gone for ever, and that

(to speak with all reverence) God Himself can never give us back that day again.

But there are certain seasons of the year, there are stages on life's journey, there are anniversaries in our domestic calendar, on which we are forced, in spite of ourselves, to note the flight of time, and the steady silent march of the days and weeks and months. Sometimes it is the falling of a birthday that thus sets us thinking. We remember what an important occasion it used to be in the days that are past. We think of some who "have gone from us for ever," and of the blessings and congratulations we never failed to receive on that day from lips that have long been silent in death.

Or it may be the occasion of a Confirmation, or of a wedding—or the falling of a great shadow upon our life. And then we begin to think how the time has gone! It seems but the other day that the child now "brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him," was in his cradle; that the daughter whose bridal it is, was learning to lisp her first prayers to God; that the aged servant of God whom we have left sleeping his long sleep, was a hale and hearty young man, who laughed and ran and played with us when we were children.

Or it is the day on which our home of many years is broken up, and we leave the place where

our work has been done, and our children have been born, and friendships have been made, and so many life-lessons have been learnt. And, looking back to the day when we came to that home, with the best days of our life yet before us, and the sound of marriage bells in our ears, we say, "It is but as yesterday !"

These are some of the occasions—of importance and of interest to ourselves and our families alone—on which we find ourselves reflecting, for ever so short a space, on the flight of time. And there is at least one other occasion—of universal interest and importance on which the reflection is forced not on us alone, but, speaking generally, on the whole world—and that is on the last day of a year. For three hundred and sixty-four days we may forget all about it, but on the three hundred and sixty-fifth we cannot help ourselves, for on all sides people are referring to it ; reminding one another that "it is the last day of the year," and indulging in the well-worn formula which *should* mean so much to all, and *does* mean so little to most—"How time flies !"

That is the thought that has been in our own hearts—those very words have been on our own lips perhaps—on this last day of the old year. Well, let the reflection bear some practical fruit

this time ; let the words result in some definite acts, making us live more wisely, more truly, more faithfully than in past years. "How time flies !" Yes, and every moment of that silent steady flight brings us nearer to the hour when, so far as we are concerned, that very flight shall cease, and Time shall be no longer !

That means that the period of our probation, with all its calls, its opportunities, its God-given chances, shall be ended. We have often pleaded for time, with God—time to prepare ; time to repent ; time to learn the great lessons He has seen good to set us ! "O spare me a little," we have cried, in days of sickness, when the sense of our utter unpreparedness has taken strong hold upon us, "Spare me a little, that I may recover my strength, before I go hence, and be no more seen !" And God has given us time. God is very patient with us all. And then we have recovered and gone about as usual, and thought no more about sick-bed promises, and sick-bed resolutions. But, all the while, Time has not stood still ; it has been going steadily on ; and we have been moving, hastening, stumbling on to the appointed hour when Time shall be no longer.

Now if you look at this verse in the Revised Version, you will find in the margin, instead of

the word "time," the word "delay." And that is the better rendering. "Time . . . no longer" does not mean that Eternity will have begun, but that a particular period or dispensation, during which God has been testing the faith and patience of His own servants, and giving space for repentance to those who refuse to hear His voice, will have come to an end. "Delay shall be no longer." Vengeance on the one hand, reward or consolation on the other, will have begun.

Brethren, God is always giving the world time. God always gives men a period of respite, a preparation season. God waits, patiently and long. He delays to fulfil His designs, to carry out His plans—but, at last, that delay, that period of respite, comes to an end. Every opportunity has been offered; every possible chance has been given—and "then cometh the end."

Sometimes this "delay" is so evident that we can all see it; there is no mistaking it. A man has a long trying illness. We are genuinely sorry for him; we grieve for his long hours of weariness and pain. But can we fail to see the mercy that is behind it? Can we not all recognise in it a blessed delay—a respite—a space for repentance, and preparation for the end? Another man is hurried into eternity by the hand of an assassin,

or the sharp stroke of sudden accident. At least that is how *we* put it—"hurried into eternity." But, indeed, I doubt whether any one is ever thus "hurried into eternity"—without his time of respite, without God's "delay" and waiting for him. We *all* have our chances. We all have our calls to repentance. God's Spirit strives with us all. For some, the time of waiting, the period of delay, ends abruptly; for others it comes creeping slowly on and we can *see* the end coming—but God is just. God does not deal less mercifully with some than He does with others. For us all, God delays and waits.

For all who are here to-day, God has delayed and waited another year. Are we truly thankful to Him for these three hundred and sixty-five days' respite? How much may be done, or left undone, how much be learnt or forgotten, in the space of a whole year? Have we come one step nearer to God since the year began? Have we grown in grace? Have we overcome one besetting sin? Have we acquired one Christian virtue? If we have not, then we have despised the long-suffering and goodness of God. We have wasted a year; and we have one year less in which to prepare for the Eternity that lies beyond.

Time flies! Another year is dying. Oh! let

the next be dedicated to God—lived in Him. So will it be “a happy New Year” indeed!

“O teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

Sermon VII

THE MINISTRY OF JUDAS

(First Sunday in Lent)

ST. MATT. x. 4

And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

“AND Judas Iscariot.” Mark that “and”; it is important and significant. It completes the list of the chosen Twelve. It couples the name of Judas—as the Lord Himself was pleased to couple it—with the names of Peter and James and John, and the rest of the Apostolic band. It assigns to Judas his due place and position in “the glorious company of the Apostles”; the high place and position from which he afterwards “by his transgression fell,” but which he held for three eventful, fateful years of his life, and in which he daily exercised the ministry to which the Lord had called him.

The ministry of Judas! The very mention of

it almost startles us ! Judas preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom ; Judas warning the careless, strengthening the faithful, soothing the penitent and conscience-stricken ! It is a character in which we utterly fail to recognise him. There are other things connected with his name—sad and terrible things—which are ever present with us, to blot the remembrance of his ministry out of our minds.

The *treachery* of Judas ! We remember that always—we can never forget it. The *remorse* of Judas ! We have no difficulty in realising that. The *despair* of Judas ! We can understand that. We can see him, with the horror in his eyes, rushing out from the presence of the sneering priests, at whose feet he has flung down the accursed silver for which he has sold his Master, and his own soul. And the *end* of Judas ! We cannot forget that—the awful deed of self-murder—and the unhappy soul faring forth in the darkness on its terrible journey “to his own place.”

All these things we can realise, easily enough. But what about these few words in which Judas is, for the first time, introduced to us ? Just those three words which complete the list of the Twelve—“and Judas Iscariot.” Well, you will say, we cannot separate them for a moment from the rest

of the sentence—"who also betrayed Him." Yes, that is quite true. It is quite true that in our horror of the traitor we lose sight of the Apostle; the figure of the thief blots out the chosen treasurer of the Apostolic band. Judas the conspirator bulks large on the page in which Judas the preacher and the healer is scarce discerned. That black deed of treachery flings its dark shadow back over all the earlier scenes of his ministry, and blurs and blots them out.

And yet, before he was a traitor, Judas was an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Before Christ called him to the Apostolate he was a disciple—he had thrown in his lot with Jesus of Nazareth; he had openly declared for Him. He had deliberately taken the unpopular side.

What led Judas, then, to become a disciple at all? God alone, "to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid"—God alone knows that. We know the facts, we see the deeds—we cannot read *motives*. We can only dimly guess at these; and, taking Judas' character as a whole, we can conjecture what his motives *may* have been. But one thing is certain—we cannot dogmatise about it.

He seems to have been an astute, calculating, ambitious man. He saw further (or at least he

possibly thought he did) than the majority of people in his day. Society, he was convinced, was at fault in its estimate of the Prophet of Galilee. He felt sure that the great miracle-worker was no ordinary man. He predicted, to himself, a great future for Him. Society would admit its short-sightedness in the end. Jesus Christ would be acknowledged by the world at last. Judas saw Him the supreme head of a great Empire—power, and glory, and honour ascribed to Him! That was his dream. Well, in that day, he, Judas, who had thrown in his lot with Him “in evil report” and in the day of His humiliation, would share His glory, would be rich, honoured, powerful; he would have his reward!

One thing is quite certain. Judas was a covetous man. The chink of money had a fascination for him. It was a joy to him merely to handle it. For money he was ready, in the end, to sell his very soul. But whatever his motives (even supposing that they were mixed motives at the best) he was one of the Saviour's own chosen band. He was made one of His Apostles. Now these Apostles of Jesus Christ were picked men; they were the very flower of the disciples. They were chosen for the gifts they possessed; for their capabilities, their fitness, their character—and Judas was one of these

We may be sure, then, that he had his gifts, his qualifications—that the material was there; that the makings of a true Apostle were in him. He was, perhaps, eminently “the man of the world” among those simple, unlearned fishermen. Well, “the man of the world” in such company is not to be despised. In himself, he is often a fine character. He has his place in society, and it is a very useful one. His outlook is wider, his grasp of affairs is bolder, his sympathies are broader often, than are the outlook and the grasp and the sympathies of mere narrow religionists. Within due limits, and with these his useful attributes balanced and corrected by innate reverence and the love and fear of God, the “man of the world” is a fine character.

Judas was evidently a good man of business. No more useful man can be found. Doubtless for this reason he was appointed treasurer of the little society. “He kept the bag”—he was the accountant. And I should say he would probably present a false balance-sheet! It is probable that he himself sought the post. It gave him opportunities, which he dearly loved, of handling money. And it proved his ruin. It exposed him to the temptations inseparable from such duties; and to these he yielded. He let himself go. He became

a pilferer, a thief, an embezzler of trust funds—and worse was to follow!

The question, of course, presents itself, “Why did Jesus Christ choose such a man to be an Apostle?” On this point, again, we dare not dogmatise. We can only reverently seek to know the Divine will. But one thing we may say with certainty, and that is, that the Saviour did not choose him in mere wantonness, and in cynical anticipation of what He knew the end would be. He did not place this man in the stronger, brighter light of Apostleship for no other reason than that his awful crime should fling the blacker shadow. I believe that the Lord chose him, and set him near His own Person, to save him, if possible, from himself. I believe that Judas, like many another bad man, was not *all* bad. Good and evil struggled within him for the mastery. Christ saw the better side that was in him; recognised his good points, and his qualifications. He would have the good developed and perfected; the evil, if it might be, wholly cast out. It was no avail. No! God Himself cannot save the man who *will not* be saved! Judas was a free agent. He went his own way.

But you will say, “Jesus Christ knew what Judas would do—knew what the end would be.” Certainly he knew. For the matter of that, God

knows what you and I will do ; what our end will be. But will any one of us dare to say he is therefore *obliged* to sin, that he is anything but an absolutely free agent. You know what the end will be of a man who is persistently drinking himself to death. But that does not prevent you from making every effort to save him from himself ; and, in any case, your *knowledge* does not make you *responsible* for his end.

What lessons may we learn from the call and ministry of Judas ? First of all we learn that the unworthiness of the minister does not render his ministerial acts null and void. The sacraments of Christ's Church are true sacraments, full of life-giving grace and power, even when administered by evil men who have been duly "called and sent."

Then let us learn a lesson of gentleness and forbearance towards those who even least of all deserve it. Think of Jesus Christ's infinite patience with Judas. He never cast him off. He took infinite trouble with him—even as he did with all. If we had our way we would, I suppose, get rid, once and for all, of all "undesirables." We are ready to take any amount of trouble and pains with the grateful, and those who are likely to do us credit. We do not care to be bothered with the sullen,

the ungrateful, and those who are only likely to disgrace or disappoint us.

And once more let us learn this lesson—that a mere knowledge of the truth will not save us; nor yet the mere fact that we are actively engaged in all kinds of good works—spending and being spent for the sake of our fellow men. Our *motives* must be pure. The mere heading of subscription lists, the chairmanship of a dozen charitable committees, a close association with services holier and more sacred still, will not justify us at the last, if our hearts be not right with God. Nay, all these things may be working infinite harm for us. Such association with the things of God has either a softening or a hardening effect. If our hearts be not right these will but increase our condemnation. Judas went up and down the country preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom; sharing the hard lot of the disciples—but he was Judas still! His mission was to cast out devils, and all the time he was serving the devil—and in the end he himself became “a devil!” “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil!” A devil, dressed as an Apostle, speaking the Apostle’s language, doing an Apostle’s work, is the worst form of devil you can ever meet. He will deceive the very elect; but he cannot deceive God.

Let us lay these lessons well to heart this Lent. Let us earnestly, honestly, examine our hearts and conscience before God—judging ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord.

Sermon VIII

THE MOTIVES OF JUDAS

(Second Sunday in Lent)

ST. JOHN xii. 4-6

Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

THE hands thus ostentatiously stretched out for the relief of the poor and needy are, seemingly, the hands of the single-hearted, unselfish, philanthropist; but the voice is the voice of Judas. Judas, in whose evil heart the mystery of iniquity is slowly, surely, working, hurrying the traitor on to the odious deed with which his name is for ever associated, and to his own most dreadful end. The voice is the voice of Judas—and even the single-hearted, simple-minded disciples are not deceived by its specious tones. “This he said,” the writer ex-

plains, "not that he cared for the poor"; and then he bluntly adds, "he was a thief!"

Judas was perhaps surprised into saying more than he had intended, and into blurting out what he may have wished to keep secret for a while longer. Yet we cannot be surprised at this outburst. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and this man's heart was daily growing more full of venom and bitterness. Just think of the impossibility, and the incongruity, of his position! He is hopelessly out of his element—out of sympathy with, and miserable in, his surroundings. The daily, hourly, association with his fellow Apostles is a continual strain and trial, keeping him in a state of chronic irritability and gloomy ill-temper. Himself unreal and insincere, the transparent sincerity, the whole-hearted devotion of these men are as hourly stings and lashes to him. Yet he must keep up appearances; he must play his part; he must wear the mask till events shall make it safe to throw the mask away.

Meanwhile the man's life is a very hell of torture to him; and the companionship of the loyal disciples almost drives him mad. What fools and simpletons they are! What mere children in worldly matters—content to follow about, at the cost of great material sacrifice, One who has nothing

to endow them with—no recompense, or compensation to offer them—and to do this simply for what He Himself is to them ! What utter folly !

Not for such poor reasons as these had *he* thrown in his lot with Jesus of Nazareth. No ! he has had his dreams and his ambitions. But as the day for the fulfilment of those visions seems as far off as ever—farther even than ever—his heart is filled with rage and bitterness.

While they, the faithful disciples are being raised to a higher life—growing gentler, transforming themselves by casting off the errors, vices, faults of their nature, race and religion—while they are entering by degrees into the Kingdom of God, through faith, docility, humility, and disregard of all earthly things—he, the false Apostle, growing stubborn in his own nature, must have become more and more fixed in his earthly instincts and in those narrow tendencies natural to his surroundings which Jesus came to combat. Ostensibly he shared in the generous feelings of his companions, but in reality he only sought after his own wretched interests.

And then to crown it all—possibly on a day when Judas' sullen broodings have made him even more than usually bitter and nervously irritable—comes this act, the outcome of a loving, devoted heart,

to fill his bitter cup to overflowing. "Then," the Evangelist tells us, "took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair : and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

The love and devotion of a full heart mean nothing to Judas—they appeal not, in the least, to him. He sees only a foolish, emotional woman, guilty of incredible, insensate folly. He sees nothing but utter perdition of good money ; and in a moment the indignant protest escapes him, "Why was this waste of the ointment made !" "This waste !"—and then remembering himself, and the part he has still to play, he makes a desperate effort to "save his face." "Of course," he would have the bystanders understand, "of course it is of the poor he is thinking—the patient, suffering poor." Is he not the almoner of the Apostolic band ? What a satisfaction it would have been to him to be commissioned to bestow all the money that costly ointment represents upon the deserving poor ! "It might have been sold for three hundred pence," he says regretfully, "and given to the poor !"

But the mask is torn away from the traitor's face. The poor ! It is not of the poor he is thinking at all. It is of himself alone. He is a thief. Already he has been guilty of peculation, and

misappropriation of the small funds entrusted to him as the chosen treasurer of the band. It was the handling of the money which the sale of the ointment would have fetched for which the thievish fingers were really itching. That costly vase and its precious contents had been accurately valued by this man, to whom the chink of money was as music; and he felt as though he had been personally cheated out of that large sum.

Bear with me, my brethren, if I stop here one moment to utter a word of practical warning. The post of treasurer to a club, or society, or charity, with the handling of money and the administration of trust funds, is a post that certain people earnestly covet, and it is one which they, of all others, should never seek, or accept. To these it is a danger, a temptation, and a snare. It has been the ruin of some who have gone to penal servitude; of others who have lost their own self-respect and the confidence of their fellow men. For many it has spelt moral deterioration. Judas, in all probability, sought this post. It was the one of all others he should have steadily avoided and refused. Such a man as he was should never have carried the bag and accepted the control of its contents. He did both—and we know with what results. He became a thief!

“This ointment might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor.” How far Judas was still deceiving himself, as a consequence of the double life he was leading, it is impossible to say. But one thing is certain—he gives expression to a sentiment in itself altogether excellent: anxiety for the poor and suffering. But he cared nothing for the poor; the suffering had no place in his heart and sympathies at all. He cared only for himself. But he found “the poor” a good name to conjure with—and anxiety on their behalf a useful sentiment behind which to hide his own unworthy, evil motives. He gnashes his teeth with rage, not because the poor have suffered any loss, but because he feels as though he himself has been cheated out of a large sum of money, and that he is, by that amount, a poorer man!

“This he said, not that he cared for the poor.” No! but how easy it is to make concern for the poor, the ignorant, the helpless—a concern which we do not in the least feel—an excuse for evading the plainest duties. Who that has ever pleaded the cause of Foreign Missions has not had to combat the foolish, and not seldom disingenuous, objection that the money would be much better spent on “the heathen at home.” And how often might one answer the objector and say, quite truthfully,

“ This you say, not because you care at all for the ‘ heathen at home ’—for you know you never lift a finger on their behalf—but simply because, while calling yourself a Christian, you seek to evade a Christian’s first duty ; and a seeming concern for the ‘ heathen at home ’ is a very useful sentiment behind which to take shelter.”

Who has not been told that the money spent on church building and decoration is money “wasted”? “How much better it would have been,” say the objectors, “to spend it on hospitals or asylums, or pleasure grounds for the people!” And this so many say, not because they care for hospitals or asylums (which would indeed be in a bad way if they had to depend upon the support of these objectors), but because money given simply as the outcome of love for, and gratitude to the good God, without any sort of return being looked for, seems to them as money *wasted*. A heart’s devotion is a mere phrase to these ; they do not understand it. It cannot be a sound asset, for it does not pretend to have anything utilitarian about it.

Ah ! this selfish, self-seeking, grudging spirit, which entrenches itself behind high-sounding phrases and laudable sentiments which *cost* nothing, is the very mark of the modern Judas. Let us

beware of it. Let us analyse our true feelings and look well into our own hearts when we glibly run off easily-expressed and highly-worthy sentiments. These may even, indeed, be translated into worthy deeds, but, all the while, from *wrong motives*.

To be known as a patron of that noble charity, or as the chairman of that excellent trust ; to have one's name inscribed in gold letters as the donor of a drinking fountain, or as the founder of an alms-house, is not sufficient, in itself, to win the Master's approval. What lies at the bottom of our good deeds ? What is our motive ? What if God should be saying of us, " This he does, not that he cares for the poor, the aged, the toilers, the suffering, but because visions of rewards and decorations, of knighthood, or of a peerage, make all such efforts worth his while. What care or concern can he have for the toilers, when the money ostentatiously spent in the pleasant suburbs is wrung from hands sweated and ground down and poisoned, under the most appalling conditions, in the cheerless, sordid slums of the great smoke-begrimed city."

Judas Iscariot—with his easily spoken words on behalf of the poor, for whom he cares nothing ; with his covetous, thievish heart—still lives. The temptation comes to us all, at times, to conceal

our real motives behind plausible sentiments and phrases. It is not by what we say, or even by what we do, but by the *motives* which have prompted our words and deeds that God will judge us at the last.

Sermon IX

“THE REWARD OF INIQUITY”

(Third Sunday in Lent)

ST. MATT. xxvi. 14-15

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

JUDAS throws off the mask at last. He has long been a disappointed, soured man; now he is a desperate one. It often happens thus with men of his character, when their calculations have been upset and their plans have all miscarried.

Good men and bad alike have their hopes and their ambitions. Good and bad alike see visions and dream dreams. But the difference between the two is to be seen in the effect which the shattering of their illusions has upon the one and the other. Disappointment leaves the one humbled and chastened indeed, but none the less resolved to

70 “The Reward of Iniquity”

go on in the path of duty, bravely, hopefully, patiently. It leaves the other full of anger and bitterness; with envy, hatred, and malice in his heart—desperate, and ready for mischief. If his ambition has been frustrated in one direction, he will revenge himself and reward himself in some other way; and he will not be particular about the means he employs.

So it was with Judas. He had not thrown in his lot with Jesus of Nazareth for nothing. He had accounted himself an astute, far-seeing man, and he had dreamed all along of large and full rewards. It was not a very worthy or noble actuating motive, this following of Jesus Christ for what he hoped to get. Still it was not (at the outset, at any rate) the worst. It was at least the reward of *discipleship* he looked for. But now that hope is destroyed. A good man would have been the better for the disappointment. He would have learnt a useful lesson from it. But Judas was not a good man, and the effect upon him was altogether different.

He was determined not to be disappointed altogether. A reward of some sort he was resolved to have; and if the reward of discipleship was denied him, why, then he would revenge himself with *the reward of iniquity*. And so, when his last

hope has faded, he steals away, this savage, desperate man, to the chief priests, and he says to them, “What will ye give me, and I will betray Him unto you.”

“What will ye give me?” It is the question of a man whose life is guided and governed by one over-mastering impulse—the greed of gain; whose ears are open to one sound—the chink of coin; in whose dreams one baneful light is for ever flickering and flashing—the glint of money.

What the colour of wine is to some men, that the colour of money is to others—so alluring, so fascinating, that in order to clutch and handle it they will sell their very souls. They will descend to any depths of wickedness with that question upon their lips, “What will you give me? Only make it worth my while. Pay me well, and I will serve you well; for, look you, I have already sold myself to serve the devil!”

So Judas, the soured, disappointed man, has become Judas, the desperate man. There is now but one short step between his worse and his worst self. Soon he will be Judas the traitor!

Are there any who hear me now who have been dreaming dreams? Not noble, worthy, up-lifting dreams of service and of sacrifice; of rescuing the sin-bound, of raising the fallen, of strengthening

the weak—but just mere sordid dreams of gain and reward—dreams in which self, and self alone, bulks large; and whose dreams are even now fading; who begin to see not realisation, but disappointment awaiting them? Are there any such here? My brothers! shake off those dreams, rouse you from those earth-born visions. Set before your eyes better, nobler dreams than these. Learn that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," ere you become first, a disappointed, soured man, and then, perhaps, a desperate one, a curse to yourself, and a danger to others.

Judas has gone from bad to worse. Now the *worst* is to come. He is conscious now that that earthly kingdom of which he has dreamed will never be established. He is convinced now that the Saviour's ministry will not issue in that glorious triumph he had pictured. No! it will be a failure. His enemies, the chief priests and scribes, are a powerful body. *They* will prevail. The future is with *them*, and not with Jesus of Nazareth. They will put Him to death, and that will be an evil day for the disciples, who have forsaken all to follow Him. For them it will mean utter ruin.

Well, Judas will not quietly await the catastrophe. He will anticipate events. He will go over to the stronger side. And then, when the storm breaks

in which his fellow disciples shall be swept away, he, the one far-seeing, the only statesmanlike one of the whole band, will remain triumphant, tranquil, and secure. He will even make something out of all this. Quiet betrayal of His Master is the way to hasten the end which he sees must surely come. For such a service the Saviour's enemies will be only too glad to pay. He will undertake that terrible service. He will propose that betrayal. And so, to the chief priests he goes ; and from that secret, shameful conference with them he comes out a worse man than he ever was before. Henceforth, he is “Judas Iscariot who also betrayed Him !”

As you picture him, my brethren, setting out on that dreadful mission, you say, perhaps, “Did this thing come upon him in a moment? Was he suddenly tempted? Did he suddenly fall?” It is a fair question ; and it is full of a sad interest for us all. But I think that the answer to that question is, “No ! it was *not* sudden.” For the matter of that, we may fairly question whether any such fall is really sudden. It may appear sudden to men. But the crisis of the moment is determined by the tenor of the life. It is not sudden to Almighty God, who has noted the hidden currents and the general drift of a man's life. It

is not sudden to Satan, who has engineered the whole sad course of events, with the terrible lapse at the end of it all.

Believe me, brethren, we prepare ourselves to a very real extent—by our habitual thoughts, by our tastes, and by the general bent of our lives—for the temptations that come to us at many a stage along life's way. We accustom ourselves to the thought of sin; we look upon evil, and we dally with it. The thing we have been accustomed to contemplate, is the thing we *do* at last. We may seem to do it suddenly, and under the impulse of the moment, but the process has been gradual—the fall is not really sudden.

Therefore, my brethren, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report," think on *these* things. That is the best way to be prepared for successful conflict with Satan when he comes to us. Let us not look upon sin, nor accustom ourselves to the thought of evil. Let us turn away from the very suggestion of it, as from something altogether odious and to be abhorred. For that which we *think* to-day is that which we are in danger of *doing* to-morrow. Our habitual thoughts have much to do with determin-

ing the tenor of our lives ; and upon the tenor of the life depends the issue of the crisis when it comes. So it would appear to have been with Judas. A covetous, coarse, crafty man, he had nursed and fed the evil that was in his nature, and so remained impervious to the teaching and influence of his Divine Master. Avarice was the dominant note of his character. The thought of gain was ever uppermost in his mind, and crowded out every other thought.

What would Jesus of Nazareth *give* him as the reward of discipleship ? What would be his share of glory and honour in that kingdom of which he had dreamed ? And then when he was convinced at last that that kingdom would never be established on earth, that his avaricious dreams would never be realised, he went over to the Saviour's enemies, and his first words to them, expressive of that uppermost, ever-present thought, were these—“What will ye give me ? ” “And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.” And for that paltry sum, only a few pounds of our English money, Judas sold his Master to the Jews, and his own soul to Satan.

It is incomprehensible—and it would seem incredible were it not that, as a matter of daily experience, sin and folly are seen to go hand in

76 "The Reward of Iniquity"

hand. "For sixpence I have ruined my prospects and lost my character," a man was reported in the papers to have said the other day, when he had been convicted of stealing that paltry sum.

For a few paltry shillings a man of education and position has cheated at cards and become a social outcast. In order to save a few coppers, a man to whom twice as many pounds would have been a mere trifle, has been convicted of defrauding a railway company. For the sake of objects, utterly unworthy of admiration, affection, and regard, men have been unfaithful to their wives, women to their husbands—children have been deserted, homes have been broken up, lives have been ruined.

Satan's wages are indeed hardly earned—and such as they are, they burn and blister the hands stretched out to receive them. "What will ye give me?" It is for what we imagine Satan is going to give us that we give up ourselves to him and to his service. It is with bitter grief and disappointment we learn, at the last, that what he gives is not worth having, and that shame and sorrow are added with it. He is the hardest, cruellest master that ever a man served. Such as he has he bestows, indeed, as wages; but poor comfort is there in that, seeing that "The wages of sin is death!"

Sermon X

THE ISOLATION OF JUDAS

(Fourth Sunday in Lent)

ST. MATT. xxvii. 3-4

Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that.

THE dark hours of the night of the betrayal are ended; the morning has come, and Jerusalem, the Holy City, is awaking to the saddest day that ever dawned on sinful earth. The drama of the Passion has begun; and as the darkness lifts, the curtain of the new day rises on one of the lesser yet one of the most painfully dramatic of its many scenes—the last meeting between Judas Iscariot and his late confederates, the chief priests and scribes.

His *late* confederates, I say, for although but a few short hours have elapsed since he had fulfilled

his share of the shameful compact made between them, these men have already done with him. They have no wish to see him again, or to hold further communication with him. He has served their ends ; he has done their work. He has been a ready, willing, but contemptible tool in their hands. They are glad to have no further use for him ; and they throw him contemptuously aside.

I suppose the most lonely, as well as the most hopelessly wretched creature on God's earth, that fair spring morning, was this wild, haggard man—who, with the horror in his eyes, “ the innocent blood ” upon his head, and the terrible “ price of blood ” clutched in his nervous, twitching hands, comes rushing in upon the conclave of the priests in the Temple. “ I have sinned,” he cries hoarsely, and with a desperation that is pathetic, it is so hopeless—“ I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood ! ”

But why has he come *here* to say this ? What does he expect from these supercilious, ceremonially-clean, sneering plotters, who look up at him in contemptuous astonishment ? Are they likely to speak soothing, reassuring words, that shall set his troubled mind, his gnawing conscience, at rest ? No ! they soon let him see that they will have nothing whatever to do with him. “ What

is that to us?" they sneeringly reply. "See thou to that!"

Ah! my brethren, there is nothing in the world that so effectually isolates a man as sin; and Judas is the most lonely man in the world on this first Good Friday morning. Where is he to go? What is he to do? Who will speak a word of pity or of comfort to him? Four and twenty hours ago he had been a person of some importance to the Scribes and Pharisees. In his own hands he had held the power to set the whole terrible drama of the Passion in motion. And he had used the power. He had done the deed—and where is he, what is he, now?

Yes, sin, as we contemplated it before its commission, and sin looked upon after its commission, are two very different things. Then, we saw it only as Satan painted it, and made it to appear—"A thing to be desired." Now, we see it in its hideous, naked, loathsome reality, just as it is.

Judas had hardly carried out his terrible deed of treachery, when all false appearances were rudely torn away, and he saw, as in a flash, the meaning of it all, the hideousness of it all, the vileness of it all. And with it all, he saw himself also; and the sight was more than he could bear. No wonder a horror has seized upon him, under which he is

unable to sit still. He is a terror to himself. His one desire is to escape from himself. He must mix with others ; he must speak to some one. But with *whom* ? That is the question. Who wants him ? To whom can he go ?

And now he begins to realise how effectually his master the devil has isolated him—cut him off from all mankind ; or from all good and true men at any rate ! There are his late companions and fellow Apostles. He used to despise them in his heart, and to pity them in the days gone by. He would give anything to be even as one of them now. He cannot betake himself to them. He has banished himself from their society for ever. He has not only sold their Master into the hands of his foes, he has betrayed *them* also.

Every traitor is a fierce egoist. Judas had thoughts only of himself—never of others. Now he is isolated ; left to himself—the self he has come to abhor.

Then there is Jesus, the Friend of sinners, the loving, gentle, pitiful Master. Ah ! but the mere remembrance of the Master is agony to him now. Jesus, the truest friend man ever had, is the Jesus whom he has betrayed !

What is he to do then ? Where is he to go ? Ah ! there^{are} are those others—the men whom he

had sought out, whose goodwill he had courted, whose money he had taken—whom now he hates and loathes—those chief priests and scribes who had received him gladly, who had accepted his vile offer. To *them* at least he has a right to turn. He and they are bound together by the chain of a hateful compact. If he is cut off from association with good men, he can at least betake himself to the evil and the bad. And so, with some wild, impossible idea of making restitution and amends clamouring within his stormy breast, surging through his disordered brain, away to the Temple he goes, and bursts in upon the assembled priests with the words, “I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!”

But they soon let him feel that he has no place there, that he has no claim upon *them*. They have paid him for his vile work, and that is enough. Let him remember what he is—let him keep his distance. Even these men let him see that they hold themselves infinitely superior to a Judas! “*We* are not traitors; and we do not want any dealing with traitors. You are uneasy in your mind, are you? You loathe yourself, do you? Well you may! A traitor *is* a loathsome creature. You wish you had never had a hand in all this? It is ‘innocent Blood’ that you have betrayed? So

much the worse for you ! You should have thought of all that before. What is all this to us ? See thou to it. Why do you trouble us with these details ? ”

And so the wretched man knows that he is an outcast—that he stands alone. Haunted by the memory of that dark scene in Gethsemane, hunted by devils, he feels the darkness closing in on him on every side. He looks on the hard, cruel faces before him, and he knows that no word of comfort, no ray of hope, is to be looked for here. “ What is that to us ? See thou to that ! ” His last hope is gone—his isolation is complete !

See, my brethren, how the devil treats his dupes and those who sell themselves to serve him. In the first place, he *disappoints* them. The actual enjoyment of sin which he prevails upon men to commit is very far from what the anticipation of it has been. Again and again when we have listened to his voice and done that against which our conscience rebelled, yielding to the fascination and the fair promise of it all, we have turned away in disgust, and said, “ After all, it was not worth it ! ”

The thirty pieces of silver were valueless in Judas’ eyes the moment he had earned them. He did not want them. He loathed the very sight of

the money; the terrible "price of blood," and that "the innocent blood!"

In the next place, Satan, having disappointed his dupes, begins to *mock* them. When, instead of the pleasure he had looked for, there comes to the sinner only a horror and a loathing of what he has done, a sickening remorse, and perhaps the ever-present dread of detection, the wretched victim cries out against his tempter, and says, "Why did you persuade me to do this? Why was I such a fool as to listen?" Satan only mocks and says, "Ah! it is too late to talk about all that now. The thing is done. And, after all, you were not *obliged* to do it. Your will was your own, and it was a *free* will. At any rate, it is no use making your moan to *me*! You have done wrong? Well, what is that to me? 'See thou to that!'"

And, finally, the devil *isolates* the sinner. Does not the consciousness of sin make you feel that you are cut off from the companionship of good men and women? Does it not make you feel that you are unfit to associate with those whom you respect, and whom perhaps you love best in the world? Your sin may be hidden from them, and yet you feel that it has placed you at a great moral distance from them. "Ah!" you say within yourself, "if they only knew all! They would never

take my hand ; they would never speak to me ; they could never bear the sight of me ! ” Sin has cut you off from them, and placed this horrible, invisible barrier between you.

It reminds me of a case I once read about—the case of a woman who had deliberately sinned against God and her own soul, who had become reckless and hardened, and who had persuaded herself that she had a right to live as she pleased, and to “ enjoy life,” and a horrible parody of what she called love, in her own terrible way. She herself told her story, and she told how in the midst of those dark, evil days, and while she was in that hard, defiant mood, she paid a Christmas visit to her parents, who idolised her, and who were in utter ignorance of her sin. So hard had she become that she thought she could do anything, face any one, without so much as a blush. “ But oh ! ” she said, “ when my father came out in his gladness to meet me, and when he took me in his arms and kissed me, I could not look into his dear face, and I would hardly speak to him, because I *could* not ! ”

Once they were all in all to each other, those two, with never a secret from each other, and now there came this separation between them, and she understood the isolation that is the result of sin !

Brethren, all loneliness is a trial ; but it is only

the loneliness that sin begets that is unutterable agony. There is a loneliness that comes to us, sometimes, in the path of duty, and in the all-wise, loving Providence of God. It is painful indeed, but, for God's people it has its blessings, its opportunities, its sacred possibilities also ; for it is a loneliness which was felt, and which has been sanctified by the Master Himself, in His sacred Life and Passion. It is a loneliness for which many live to thank God, for in it He has come into their lives, and they have realised that they were never less alone than when alone.

But from that other awful, unutterable loneliness, in which life becomes a horror, and the thought of death a terror, God save us all—the terrible isolation of sin !

Sermon XI

“TO HIS OWN PLACE ”

(Fifth Sunday in Lent)

ST. MATT. xxvii. 5

And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

WITH these terrible words the story of Judas closes. The curtain drops upon the last scene of the tragedy in which he has played his dreadful part. The traitor quits the stage and we see him no more. The rest is hidden from our eyes. We have neither the will nor the power to follow the haunted soul as it fares forth into outer darkness on its dim, dread journey to its “own place.”

In that dramatic scene with the chief priests within the Temple walls, when he returned the blood-money he had so basely earned, we see Judas for the last time. In horror and despair he flings down the pieces of silver, and as they ring upon the Temple pavement we seem to hear the death

knell of the traitor in the sound. We can only picture the rest—the doomed, despairing man rushing out into the warmth and brightness of the sweet spring morning, of which he is not even conscious ; out into the noise and movement of the busy streets, which he does not even hear.

We can imagine the passers-by standing aside from this wild, haggard figure, with the madness in his starting eyes ; little children ceasing from their shouts and their play ; the very street dogs cowering and slinking away from him as he goes rushing past, bound for “his own place.”

Thus Judas turns his back upon the Temple which he will never enter again. Even thus he would fain turn his back upon and fly from the Presence of God, Whose Temple it is. Maddened and hopeless, onward he goes—past the High Priests’ palace, whither they had taken the Master, bound as a malefactor, and where Judas had perhaps seen Him humbled, mocked, spitted on ; past the Prætorium, from whence the shouts and clamour of the excited crowd reach him—for there Pilate is even now taking his place upon the judgment-seat, and the mock trial before the Roman Governor has begun. From all the familiar sights and sounds of the Holy City, like a hunted thing he flies, and disappears into that solitude from

which he will never emerge alive. In that solitude we may not know what "unclean wings come flapping about his head," but there the wretched, hopeless, lonely man bids farewell to earth, and takes that awful plunge into Eternity and the immediate Presence of his God and Judge, in the dreadful act of suicide.

Tradition stills points out a ragged, ghastly, wind-swept tree, known as "the tree of Judas," as that on which the traitor hanged himself. For thirty pieces of silver he had sold his Master into the hands of His enemies, and his own soul to Satan, only to learn that "the wages of sin is death." Not one of those pieces did Judas spend or enjoy. With the "blood-money," the sanctimonious priests bought the potter's field, a plot of ground which Judas had possibly intended to purchase, and in which he met his end. "That field," says a writer, "was long known and shuddered at as the Acel-dama, or 'field of blood'—a place foul, haunted, and horrible."

And so Judas passes for ever from human sight, "to his own place"—the place for which he had prepared himself by his fraud and his covetousness, his hypocrisy, and his treachery; whilst, if he had used well the grace vouchsafed to him, he might have prepared for himself a throne

in Heaven, close to that of his Master and his Lord.

And there we leave him—and we are glad to leave him, thankful that we have *power* to do no more—to God, his just and infallible Judge. His story has been written in vain if we fail to take warning from his downward career, his terrible fall, his tragic end. But when he has passed into the spirit world he has passed beyond the bar of human judgment to the tribunal of the Most High. It is not for us to judge or to seek to determine his state in eternity. This is a subject on which we dare not dogmatise—but neither dare we place even Judas beyond the pale of Christ’s infinite mercy.

There was a compassionate belief in the early days of the Church, which seems to have been not uncommonly held, that Judas was moved to take his life by some confused thought that beyond the veil, in the life to come, he might meet his Master once more, and fall down at His feet, and implore forgiveness for his sin.

That is only a tradition—and if such a thought or suggestion was ever flashed into his mind, it could only have been the suggestion of the Evil One. Still, who can help feeling that in that loathing of himself and of his guilt, which made

life intolerable to him, even in that unworthy, imperfect repentance, which itself needed to be repented of, there is some proof that God had not wholly forsaken the wretched man ; that the Holy Spirit was still ready to strive with him ; that conscience was not wholly dead.

In mediæval times there was a legend, that for the sake of one good and kindly deed, done in the days of his innocency, Judas was liberated from hell once in every thousand years, and allowed to cool and refresh himself for one whole day amid the eternal snows of some lofty mountain.

Only a legend again—yet enshrining a thought that one must be glad to dwell upon, namely, that there was a past even in Judas’ life which the all-merciful God would keep before Him in the book of His remembrance. There had been days and moments in Iscariot’s life which had been far removed from his last days upon earth. He had been an innocent child once. Like other Jewish lads, he had doubtless been led by his parents to the worship of Jehovah, in synagogue and Temple services. Who can say what good influences his heart may not have been opened to receive in those early days ? What “thoughts of God,” what “hopes of Heaven” may not have inspired and uplifted him for ever so short a time.

There were those early days of his Apostleship too. Without some of the necessary qualifications he would never have been chosen by the Saviour to that high office. Surely goodness, honour, devotion and self-sacrifice were not wholly unknown to him then. Was he not among those who went forth without scrip and purse, through the cities and villages of Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom? Was he not among the number of those who returned to their Master rejoicing in the results of their mission, and crying, “Lord! the very devils are subject unto us, through Thy Name!”

We are glad to think, amid all the sorrow, and the darkness, and the horror of the end, of those earlier, better days—we are glad to think of the money flung down in the Temple, for he might have done worse with that money; he might have gone away, in his desperation, and spent it in some hideous orgy—and for the rest, what shall we say? Well, what *can* we say, save this—“To his own God and Judge we leave him. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Nevertheless, his story remains—lurid, awful, and full of warning. To the end of time, he will be known as “Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed Him.” Take that fact alone, his dishonourable

betrayal of a friend. Put out of sight the Crucifixion. He had no actual hand in that; and he was dead before it was accomplished. Put out of sight also the whole transcendent scheme of redemption; of that he knew nothing. But that dishonourable, that odious, act of betrayal remains, and will remain.

On that count alone we condemn him; and do we not declare that on that count alone we do well to condemn the wretched man who did this thing? Very good—but are *we* without sin, in *this* matter even? Have *we* never betrayed the Lord? “All our evils are betrayals of Christ, and all our betrayals of Christ are sins against a perfect wisdom and an unvaried goodness.” We may not judge others, God is their Judge. But we are indeed “fools and blind” if we judge not ourselves!

Thus Judas—an Apostle once; afterwards a thief and a traitor; at the last a suicide—died, and went “to his own place!” It was the place for which, by his false, evil life, he had prepared himself. All the days of a man’s earthly life are a preparation for “his own place” in the life within the veil. Through all this, our earthly life of struggle and temptation, of freedom and responsibility, God give us grace to prepare ourselves for some place of eternal service at the feet of our Master and our King!

Sermon XII

THE DAY OF EXCITEMENT

(*Palm Sunday*)

ST. MATT. xxi. 9

And the multitudes that went before and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David : Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord : Hosanna in the highest.

THOSE of us who have lived in India know something of the elements of dangerous unrest and ferocious fanaticism that are always present in the great crowds of worshippers which the religious festivals, Hindoo and Mohammedan alike, never fail to draw together. Such crowds very easily get out of hand and become unmanageable, and it takes very little sometimes to set a whole city or country-side ablaze. The mere cry “Deen ! Deen !” (the Faith ! the Faith !) on such occasions is like the setting of a match to dry leaves and tinder.

Now just such suppressed emotion and excite-

ment not infrequently existed among the vast crowds that flocked into the Holy City for the great Jewish festivals in the days of our blessed Lord's ministry, when the sceptre had departed from Judah, and a hated alien race held the reins of government and ruled over God's ancient people. Something like the cry of "Deen" to a Mohammedan crowd was the cry of "Hosanna" to a Jewish crowd in those days, at the time of the Passover. It was the cry with which the bands of pilgrims were greeted as they entered the city of David, and it was one that appealed with peculiar force to the religious and patriotic instincts of every Jew that heard it. And that was the cry that rent the air and startled and moved the whole city, on that memorable entry of the Saviour into Jerusalem which we commemorate on this Palm Sunday.

The Lord Jesus Christ had visited the Holy City before that day, many a time and oft. But never had He entered it as He was entering it now. Hitherto He had come unnoticed and unknown—afoot, and travel-stained, along the dusty road. His visits had caused no excitement. His coming and going were marked by no unusual sight. But to-day He is the central Figure of a great procession. All eyes are turned upon Him. Men cannot choose but gaze on Him, whether they

look in love and expectation, or in anger and contempt.

All that was written in the Law and the Prophets concerning Him was being accomplished ; and the very manner of His entry into Jerusalem that day was in exact fulfilment of an ancient prophecy. And so He comes, on this one occasion, meek and lowly as He ever was, but riding as a King into the wondrous city that was still the centre of the aspirations of the Jewish nation.

No wonder the city is stirred ! What a sight it is ! Crowds flock out from Jerusalem. The pilgrims for the Passover week lodging in Bethany join the large band of disciples. The travellers come from their camping tents and lodgments on the Mount of Olives—the whole broad road to Jerusalem is a moving mass of wild excitement. Suddenly the cry of “Hosanna” is raised, and the hearts of the hearers are stirred as the trees of a forest are stirred by a mighty wind. The tall, tapering, palm trees are stripped of their leaves, the festal garments of those nearest the centre of the crowd are flung off, and both are laid on the dusty road, for the ass, with its sacred burden, to pass over. And louder and louder the cry of Hosanna goes up, and swells into a mighty roar, so that the passers-by in the streets of the city far

below hear it, and stop to ask what all this noise and excitement may mean !

It was such a luxury to these people to “let themselves go” in this way ; to indulge themselves and stimulate each other with this religious and patriotic battle-cry. It gave them such a glorious opportunity for flouting the hated government ; for defying Pilate and Herod ; for insulting the Roman soldiers, with their ostentatious guard mountings in Antonia, and their picquets patrolling the streets and by-ways of the sacred city—stolid, and quite unmoved by the unconcealed hatred of the populace.

“Hosanna!” cry the crowd, “and again Hosanna! The dawn of a new age has come at last. The Son of God will take His own. No more tryanny ; no more heathen rulers in the very courts of the Temple ; no more tax and tribute to a barbarous Cæsar ! The glory and the power of David’s Kingdom is come again ! Let the Christ enter His own city. Let Him take the sword. Let Him proclaim Himself the Son of David that cometh in the name of the Lord. Let Him reign the Warrior King of the New Jerusalem ! Hosanna in the highest !”

Thus they cried, these easily-excited people, and shouted themselves hoarse. But, after all,

what did it mean? What was all the shouting worth? It meant little—it was worth less! A crowd is so easily stirred—so easily moved either to cheer and applaud, or to hoot and hiss. And so it was with *this* crowd. The shouting died away at last; the excitement was over. The shouters dispersed and went each his own way and to his own business, and soon forgot all about it. And then, a few days afterwards, they were again just as easily excited, and just as easily stirred with other emotions, and they cried again, just as readily, just as reasonably (or unreasonably), not “Hosanna!” but “Crucify Him! Crucify!”

No wonder the Saviour’s heart ached as He heard the shouting, and looked upon the easily moved, thoughtless, heedless crowd! No wonder that just when the triumph was mightiest, and the victory seemingly most complete, the King stayed on the brow of the hill and wept—and this, not for the terror that was awaiting Him, not for the bitterness of the change that was to come over the happy crowd—but for the beautiful, doomed city that lay before Him, and for the unhappy nation that was to reject Him.

And now, what about ourselves? We are commemorating the events of that first Palm Sunday. We have been picturing that scene—more than that,

we have been re-enacting it. We have joined the crowd ; we have greeted the Saviour.

All glory, laud, and honour
To Thee, Redeemer, King !

we have cried. Our hearts have been stirred, our sympathies have been awakened. Palm Sunday is a great day with us. And how much does it really mean to us after all ? After all, are “ our praise, and prayer, and anthems ” to-day worth any more, are they any sweeter in the ears of our Saviour and our King, than were those loud cries of “ Hosanna ! ” long ago ?

Ah ! it is so easy to have our feelings stirred ; to feel a religious glow warming us through and through. But is it anything more with us than a mere temporary excitement which will soon pass away and be forgotten ? “ Spiritual excitement,” says a writer, “ is dangerous as the only food of the soul ; as a foundation by itself, it is a foundation of sand. Men may be moved by their religious feelings ; they cannot be sustained by them when the inevitable reaction of dryness sets in and the storms of the world beat down upon them.”

The warning of the Day of Excitement is the warning given us on the threshold of the Holy Week. Excitement is not going to bring us nearer

to Jesus Christ—emotion is not going to conform us to the likeness of His Passion. It is as easy for us to sing our Palm Sunday hymns as it was for that Jewish crowd to cry “Hosanna!” But when the sound of the hymns has died away, when the services of the day are ended—what then? What difference is it all going to make to our lives? As surely as our feelings have been stirred to-day, so surely will there come a reaction to-morrow. If it is mere emotion with us, just that and nothing more, then we shall be not the better, but the worse, for crying “Hosanna!” to-day.

Oh! let us cast not our garments but ourselves at the Saviour’s feet! Let us give our very hearts to Him, and not merely our easily-uttered prayers and praises. Let us, morning by morning this Holy Week, meet Him, the King that cometh to us, at His own most holy Table. Receiving Him into our selves, let us pray Him to change our very lives; to make us humble, meek, gentle, forgiving, merciful to others; so may we spend not only a Holy Week, but a holy life, following ever in His most blessed steps—and when this earthly life is ended, live and reign with Him for evermore.



Sermon XIII

THE RETURN FROM CALVARY

(Good Friday)

ST. LUKE xxiii. 48

And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

“THIS is your hour, and the power of darkness,” the Saviour had said to His rough captors in Gethsemane. But now that hour had passed.

The Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth—the one and only thing that could satisfy the insensate hate and fury of the chief priests, and the savage lust for blood that had seized upon the excited populace—was accomplished.

The Great Tragedy, upon the last awful scene of which the curtain of night was beginning to fall as the long shadows came creeping up the hillsides, was played out. It was all over. Jesus Christ was dead! There was nothing now to wait for, nothing remained but for the crowds to disperse, and the spectators to go back again to their own

homes. We lift up our eyes and we see them returning. But where is their triumph? Where is the fierce joy of those who have prevailed and carried the day against Pontius Pilate, who would, if he could, have baulked them of their prey? Pilate was all against the Crucifixion. He would have denied the crowds the Great Sight which they had gone out to Calvary to see. But *they*, and not Pilate, had prevailed. They would not be denied—they refused to be cheated of their desire. “Crucify Him!” they had cried, and shrieked, and howled—“Crucify Him!” And it had been even as they wished. Hanging on the Cross, was Jesus—crucified, mangled, bleeding—dead! Surely this is indeed their hour!

But where is their triumph? where the insolent joy of the victors who have swept all obstacles out of their path, and have had their way? But *are* these the victors in the awful struggle that has been waged to-day—these hushed and awe-stricken groups of men who come stealing away in straggling knots from the Great Sight? Tumultuously they had gone out in the morning to Calvary, raging like wild beasts, howling and blaspheming. How different is their return! as, shamed, and cowed, and conscience-stricken, they turn their backs upon the hill of gloom and steal away to the city, smiting their breasts!

Are these indeed the victors on this sad death-day? No! No! The Victor, in that strange and awful strife, is the Crucified, Whom they leave hanging there upon His Cross of shame—the Figure that draws and fascinates, even while it repels them. The Crucified, Who from that Cross had spoken words of Divine love and compassion for

Those who set at nought and sold Him,
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree ;

Whose precious blood cries aloud, not for vengeance, but “for mercy on the souls of men!” *There* is the Victor! Jesus Christ, who had said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me!” The victory is His—and His alone. There is but one triumph to be recorded of that day, and that is the Triumph of the Cross!

As for these who had set up that Cross, who had done to death the best and truest Friend men ever had—they are conscious only of failure and of fear; of awful misgivings and unavailing remorse. Theirs is only “a certain fearful looking for of judgment”—of retribution, unmeasured and unknown! No wonder they come back slowly and with hesitating steps from “that sight”—smiting their breasts as they return!

“All the people who came together to that sight

. . smote their breasts and returned." And all the world had gone out to Calvary that morning. All sections of Jewish society were represented there. The religious world, and the fashionable world, and the world of letters, and the commercial world, and the criminal world, and the legal world—all these gathered about the Cross of Christ, hustling and elbowing one another for places to view "that sight." And before them all the Crucified had been lifted up in the awful publicity of a malefactor's death ; and to them all, the mystery of His Cross and Passion had made its strange, all-compelling appeal. For good, or for ill, these had all come under the influence of the Cross ; all who had seen Christ suffer, who had heard His words, who had watched Him die. And a dim, mysterious consciousness of that truth is upon them now, whispering within their hearts—stirring, in one way or another, their troubled consciences—causing them to beat their breasts as they return !

They had never, for a moment, imagined what "that sight" was going to be, as, tumultuously, eagerly, they had gone surging out, in the sweet spring morning, as to "a sight"—and nothing more. But what a sight it had proved to be ! Was such a death-scene ever witnessed ? Could such ever be witnessed again—when, amid the

death-throes of the God of Nature, Nature herself gave such weird and awful signs of anguish? To their dying day, none who witnessed it all could ever forget it—the unearthly gloom at high noon-tide—and later, when the Crucified bowed His sacred head, and with that cry of triumph, “It is finished!” gave up the ghost—the shattered rocks, and the earthquake, and the very dead startled out of their sleep, and the veil of the Temple rent in twain!

Who could talk of victory—of triumph—amid such scenes as these, except, indeed, to ascribe the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, to the lone Figure that marked the sky? Who, with these awful scenes before him, and that mighty death-cry still ringing in his ears, could fail in his heart to echo (even if he dared not say it boldly with his lips) that great confession of the Roman officer, on duty at the Crucifixion, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

“This was the Son of God!” Well, that being so, what had God in store for those who had rejected the Son, and put Him to an open shame? The deed was done—nothing could now undo it. No good could come of lingering on Calvary now. There was nothing to be done but to steal home again. But what vengeance awaited those who

only a few hours ago, had been crying, "His blood be on us, and on our children!" What can they do but smite their breasts and return?

Brethren, it is to "that Sight" that we, too, have "come together" to-day. The Cross is raised before our eyes; in our ears are sounding again those "seven words of love." We, too, will shortly be returning from the Great Sight on which we are this day called to gaze. How have we come hither? In what spirit have we come? How shall we go hence? With what feelings in our breasts, with what thoughts in our hearts, shall we go hence? Shall *we* go away with less shame, less sorrow, fewer prickings of conscience than did the crowds who came streaming down from Calvary that first Good Friday? Why should we? Are we less guilty than they were? They crucified the Saviour, those Jews, with their nails and wood—*we* have crucified Him with our sins. *Sin* made that great sacrifice necessary—the sins which *we* have committed, as well as those which were done thousands of years ago. Those people whom we execrate for their cruel, fiendish work did at least return smiting their breasts. What signs of remorse, what tokens of grief, will the angels of God note in us to-day?

On the Cross I see the end of the life of self

106 The Return from Calvary

surrender. I see more than the victory of a brave, pure soul. I see the work of my sin in One who loved me to the death, and the work of His love to save me from my sin. Then, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Sermon XIV

" I MYSELF "

(Easter Day)

ST. LUKE xxiv. 39

It is I myself : handle Me, and see.

WHAT happens to us at death ? " An odd question," you say, " and unnecessary as it is odd, seeing that the answer to it is so painfully obvious. At death we cease to live. We disappear for ever from off this earthly stage, upon which we have played our eventful, or commonplace, our useful, or unedifying, but, in any case, our only-too-brief part, and we vanish into the great unknown. We go out into the darkness from the sight of our friends and kinsfolk, and our place upon earth knows us no more ! "

Ah ! but the question is one that is not so easily disposed of as all that—and the answer I have just quoted, while it contains much that is obvious and

true, involves also something that is not true. In one most important particular it is, to say the least, insufficient and inaccurate. The very first sentence in that answer—“ At death, we cease to live ”—is not a statement of fact. Our *earthly* life, indeed, ceases at death. Our life, that is, with its surroundings, and limitations, and conditions, as we live it now—*that* life ceases ; but *we* do not cease to live.

Death, my brethren, is sometimes called “ the destroyer ”—and a destroyer it is, in many ways ; a destroyer of earthly hopes, and homes, and plans, and projects. But much as it can do in the way of destruction, there is something which death *cannot* do. *It cannot destroy us—ourselves.* It cannot destroy our identity, or that separate individual existence, carrying with it its own individual responsibilities, which God bestowed upon each of us at the moment of our birth.

Now this was one of the great object-lessons taught by the risen Lord to His doubting disciples on the day of His Resurrection from the grave. It is the lesson of the words, “ It is I myself.” It is the lesson I want to impress upon you, that I want you to take hold of, and to carry away with you on this glad Easter Day.

The Easter sun—which had risen upon the empty,

angel-guarded sepulchre in Gethsemane ; upon the distressed and bewildered group of women who were early at that sepulchre ; upon the Roman guard of soldiers marching back to the Holy City after their vain and useless watch—had sunk again to his rest. The even was come, and the disciples were gathered together, with closed doors, in their upper room in Jerusalem. It had been a trying and anxious day for them ; a day in which hope and fear alternated within their breasts. All day long the air had been full of rumours. Some of their number had come hurrying back from Gethsemane with a story of an empty tomb and a vision of angels ; some positively declared that the Lord had risen and had been actually seen and spoken with. At one moment these rumours had seemed to them as mere idle tales, at another their hearts were lifted high with hope.

What were they to think of it all ? What were they to believe ? Then, in the midst of their eager questionings and surmisings, Jesus Himself suddenly stood before them, with His gracious benediction of Peace—and they were confounded and terrified.

Here was the undoubted confirmation of those strange, bewildering rumours ; here was the visible proof of the truth of what they had heard. And yet it is not joy that seizes upon them, but it is

deadly terror ! Terror ! Yes, for Jesus they knew to be dead ! They had seen Him die. They had seen the lifeless Body taken down from the Cross and laid in Joseph’s rock-hewn sepulchre. Then who could *this* be ? Either they had become the sport of their own over-wrought nerves and fancies, and this was merely a creation of their own imagination, or, at best, it was a visitant from the regions of the dead—it was a phantom—a spirit.

But they are mistaken. And the risen Master, dealing patiently and tenderly with their weakness and their unbelief, *shows* them that they are wrong. It is no spirit they are gazing upon. It is He, the Master Himself, and no other—the Jesus who died upon the Cross. And gradually the conviction grows upon them. It *is* He. He is changed, but He is not another. He speaks with the well-known voice. The same soul looks out through the same eyes. He shows them His hands and His side ; and there, plain enough for all to see, are the prints of the nails, and the cruel gash made by the spear which pierced Him.

“It is I myself !” Yes, it is the same Jesus Whom, in the days that were past, they had forsaken all to follow. He has laid down what belonged to His old life of humiliation ; He is equipped for the glorified life ; changed—yet the same Jesus.

And the risen Lord, as He looks back through the past, knows that in it all “ He had been by Himself—apart from other men—with His own separate history. His life has gone on as one, and shall go on for ever.” “ It is I myself.” Yes, death has many terrors for the children of men. It can do much, it can destroy much. But there are some things it cannot do. It cannot destroy the identity which God gives to each soul that is born into the world.

And, “ Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.” The life of the risen Lord is the earnest of what our own risen life shall be. “ We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Changed—yes, even as Christ was changed—for “ flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption ”—changed, but not changed into another and totally different personality.

All through our lives change is going on in us ; we are changing day by day. But we are the same people. Identity is not lost ; nor will it be when we pass through the last great change of all—the change that death effects. That separate individual existence which began for each of us at birth—in which death is but an episode—that existence will continue. The stream of life is

diverted, indeed, at the moment of dissolution, but it is not stopped ; it flows on, the same steady stream, only under changed conditions.

Brethren, we cannot get rid of ourselves. We cannot, as this earthly life goes on, look back upon the days and the years that are past and feel that the things done by us in them were done by other people ; that the life we lived then was lived by some one else. Neither can we escape from ourselves at death. Each one of us, as he passes to the farther shore, will stand upon that shore saying, “It is I myself.” From that distant shore we shall look back through life and recognise ourselves. We shall see in ourselves the marks of life as plainly as the risen Lord saw the wound-prints on His sacred body.

With what feelings shall we look back upon our finished life, knowing that we ourselves lived that life and not others ? Shall we look back with thankfulness and joy, or shall we review it with agony and shame ?

The answer to that question is obvious enough. That will depend upon the manner of our life here and now. If we are now yielding “our members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity,” then it will be, it must be, in shame. But if we are yielding “our members servants

to righteousness unto holiness,” then we may hope to look back with joy and thankfulness to God.

Then let us live to-day the life that we shall not be ashamed to look back upon to-morrow, and all through the great Hereafter. Live worthily, in the risen life with Christ, and live *now*.

Arise ! for the day is passing,
 And you lie dreaming on !
 And others have buckled their armour,
 And forth to the fight have gone :
 A place in the ranks awaits you,
 Each man has some part to play ;
 The Past and the Future are nothing
 In the face of the stern To-day !

Sermon XV

“POWER FROM ON HIGH”

(*Whit Sunday*)

ST. LUKE xxiv. 49

Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.

“SUPPOSE,” says a writer of the early part of the last century, “we saw a military force investing a strong fortress, and its artillery preparing to batter that fortress down. We might ask ‘How is it going to be done?’ For answer, they point to a cannon-ball. Well, but there is no power in that ; it is heavy, but not more than half a hundred-, or perhaps a hundred-weight. If all the men in the army hurled it against the fort they would make no impression. They say, ‘No, but look at the cannon.’ Well, but there is no power in that. A child may ride upon it ; a bird may perch in its mouth. It is a machine and nothing more. ‘But look at the powder.’ Well, there is no power in

that ; a child may spill it, a sparrow may scatter it. And yet the powerless powder and powerless ball are put into the powerless cannon ; one spark of fire enters it, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, that powder is a flash of lightning, and that cannon-ball is a thunder-bolt which smites as if it had been sent from heaven.”

I am reminded of that illustration when I think of the Apostles of Jesus Christ at the time of our blessed Lord’s Ascension into Heaven, and of the stupendous work that lay before them. This was nothing short of a seemingly hopeless, impossible task—nothing less than the spiritual and moral conquest of the world.

The world was to be conquered for God ; “ principalities and powers ” to be subdued to Christ ; “ the rulers of the darkness of this world ” were to be overthrown ; “ spiritual wickedness in high places ” to be met and overcome ; strongholds of Satan to be battered down—the world, in short, was to be brought under the gentle, beneficent yoke of Jesus Christ. But how was all this to be done ? Who were to do it ? Who were they whom God had chosen to enter upon this seemingly hopeless struggle with the “ Prince of this world ? ” Just a few despised, obscure, uneducated men—followers of the crucified Nazarene.

As the world viewed it, no wilder or more visionary scheme ever entered the heart of man than this. For just think what it meant. It meant that a handful of men, without position or standing in society, without any social influence, were to face the power and the prestige of imperial Rome; that men without any education, illiterate and ignorant men, were to meet the culture and the philosophy of Greece; men, above all, without courage (whom the trial and arrest of their Master had scattered like a flock of sheep) were to embark upon an enterprise that needed courage amounting almost to recklessness—were to face the religious fanaticism of the Jews, and the fierce passions of the heathen mob which could, at any moment, be stirred up against them. At the very least it meant all this. It was a stupendous task; how was it to be accomplished?

Well, “not by might, nor by power,” but by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts. Mere men these were, and weak men at that; yet when the struggle began they were warriors who warred not after the flesh. “The weapons of their warfare were not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds.” Regarded as mere *men*, they might well be compared to the round shot, and the field-piece, and the powder—each perfectly

powerless in itself; but touched by the Divine spark, “endued with power from on high,” a force to be reckoned with; a force by which the strongholds of Satan would be beaten down.

Now it is for this power that the Master, in the words of the text, bids them wait. He sees the work that has to be done. He sees the instruments chosen by God for its accomplishment. And He sees that, as they are now, they can never hope to make anything of it. As yet they are not even prepared to receive the necessary “power” from God. They must go through a period of discipline and trial first; and the test that God designs for them is the hardest one of all—the test of waiting; days of inactivity; the great test of patience! “*Tarry ye . . . until ye be endued with power from on high.*”

And not only were they to wait, but they were to wait “in the city of Jerusalem!” Jerusalem, the place of all others which they might well wish themselves safely out of! Jerusalem, where they were watched, suspected, hated; in which they lived in hourly danger of their lives. It was here their great work for God was to begin—in Jerusalem!

“Anywhere but in Jerusalem,” they would have said probably, had the choice been given them. “Anywhere but in Jerusalem, which had killed the

prophets and stoned them that had been sent unto her ! ” Jerusalem, which had filled up the measure of her iniquity by the last and most awful rejection of all—the Crucifixion of the Son of God ! What could be gained by waiting *here* ? What hope was there for any appeal made in Jerusalem ? Yet the Saviour’s command was plain enough. “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem ! ” And, mapping out the work that would be theirs in the future that lay before them, He had said, “*Beginning at Jerusalem !*”

Yes, my brethren, God works in His own way. He chooses time, and place, and people. And we need not fear to take up the work He gives us to do ; for He who chooses for us, who bids us wait His time, will also, when the time is come, endue us “with power from on high.”

So the Apostles found. The days passed on, and they waited—waited God’s time, and God’s way—and then came the reward of patience. “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” Thus were they “endued with power from on high” ; a power which manifested itself forthwith in the gift of tongues, which

confounded and amazed the multitude; a power by which two thousand souls were won for Christ that day; by which the outworks of the world's power were triumphantly carried, and the great conquest of the world for Christ begun.

And from that hour the disciples are as men transformed. Weak men before, timid and shrinking, they are bold men henceforth. Strifes, imprisonment, persecution, death—none of these things move them. They who shrank from danger and trial shrink from nothing now—rather do they count it all joy to be allowed to “suffer for His Name's sake.” “Endued with power from on high”—a power the world cannot understand and explain, but which it recognises and feels; changed men, they go forth, without doubt or fear, upon their life's work—the regeneration of the human race—the conquest of the world for God!

Such was the gift of Pentecost; the bestowal of “power from on high,” upon plain, unlettered, unknown men; the power in which the Church of God has gone on, through the ages, conquering and to conquer.

Brethren, we need that power in the Church to-day. The weak things of the world must still contend against the mighty; and they can be equal

to the struggle only when “ endued with power from on high.” We all need that power. We need, if we are to go on winning the world for God, the *power of faith*—the faith which can remove mountains, and make light of all discouragements and difficulties. We need the power of *hope*—braced by which we shall always return to the fight, sure of victory in the end. We need the power of *love*—that Divine love which, by its pure unselfishness, will unlock the hearts of men and break down the strong barriers of reserve or opposition. We need the power of *courage*, which shall enable us to work out our own ideal of duty ; to do what is right ; to strive for what is right ; to speak the truth unflinchingly, without taking counsel with flesh and blood.

We priests of God’s Church need to be endued with this power from on high in our preaching, else all our preaching is vain. Nothing can take the place of this power ; no substitute for it in the form of showy gifts, no power of eloquence, or scholarship, or fluency will avail us.

Pray for us, brethren, that we may be endued with this power ; that, every time we stand here, in all our weakness, and all our unworthiness, to speak to you in God’s Name, our hearts may be aglow with the Divine spark that shall send the

message home to the hearts of the hearers. Then, indeed, will the word spoken take deep root downwards, and bear fruit upwards, to the glory of God, the salvation of souls, the building up of the Church. Without this Divine fire all our preaching is vain.

“Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you!” It was on this day, the Feast of Pentecost, the promise was fulfilled—the Apostles “endued with power from on high.” Well may it be a great day with us—a feast-day of the Church of God. Ah! may that power abide with us for ever, waxing ever mightier and mightier through the ages, till all earthly power shall have yielded to it—till “the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.”

Sermon XVI

PILATE'S QUESTION

ST. JOHN xvlii. 38.

Pilate saith unto Him, What is Truth ?

BUT Pilate never waited for an answer. Perhaps, for one reason, because he had already made up his mind that the question was unanswerable, seeing that hitherto (as far as his experience went) it had remained unanswered.

I do not know that Pilate himself had ever put this question to any one before, but I think that he had almost certainly heard it asked by others. Discussions on the subject of truth were very much in vogue in his time. The heathen philosophers were intensely interested in the subject, and the question was one which many of them, in their different ways, were honestly trying to answer. They, at any rate, were very much in earnest about it all, and the question, "What is truth?" was a

very real one to them. And, in their different ways and according to their different philosophies, they had their various opinions about it.

Then Society had caught the question up from the philosophers, and it had become a favourite subject of debate at fashionable gatherings where the clever, brilliant people of the day were the lions of the occasion, and where the earnest aspirations and the anxious questionings, and the sober conclusions of thoughtful men were caught up, parrot-like, and made "the fashion," for the time being, by thoughtless, giddy pleasure-seekers in quest of a new excitement.

And so this solemn, weighty question—a very question of life and death—had possibly degenerated into a sort of Society conundrum: "What is Truth?"

Society, my brethren, has ever been ready thus to play at seriousness; to patronise religion, much in the same way that it would patronise the Arts and Sciences; and to amuse itself with deep religious problems. Have we not seen, in our own day, how the longings and the labours of earnest, self-denying men and women have suggested "slumming" to certain fashionables as a novel sensation—and, it may be, a sort of conscience-balance and set-off to the eternal round of frivolity, amusement, and

unaffected irresponsibility in which they have long lived and moved and had their being.

In Pilate's day the very drones of Society had been daintily sipping the honey of the philosophers ; smart people, determined to be quite up to date, were asking, " What is Truth ? "

And so, on that memorable occasion when Jesus Christ stood before Pilate and uttered those wondrous, heart-stirring words, " To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the *Truth*," it is possible that Pilate recognised in them merely the familiar topic in a new garb. " Truth ? " he says, " what is Truth ? " What has he, a busy, practical Roman Governor, to do at such a time as this with " that dim abstraction of the philosophers " ? It was all very well for people to amuse themselves, and pass the time at literary and social gatherings with academic discussions on the subject of Truth. But for Pilate it had no interest, no importance, no reality. I do not know whether he spoke superciliously and with amused indifference—it might have been so—or whether it was wearily and hopelessly, as referring to a matter which might be discussed for ever and never settled. But I am certain that he did not ask the question earnestly and anxiously, as one who felt that it was indeed

a question of life and death, or he would assuredly have paused for an answer.

As it is, he dismisses the subject with a shrug of the shoulders, and with the question, "What is Truth?" upon his lips he turns on his heel, and goes out again to face the howling mob, and merely to repeat, "I find no fault in Him!"

And so I suppose Pilate went down to his grave with that question (for him, at any rate) unanswered. Had he known Who the prisoner was in whose presence he was standing—that He was Himself the very Truth even as He was the Way and the Life—he would surely have paused and waited. And yet, I do not know. Not if Truth was to him, as I greatly fear it was, nothing more than an empty name. However it may be, Pilate's chance was given him that day—and he threw it away. Such an opportunity seldom comes twice to a man in a lifetime.

I say Pilate's chance was given him that day. Yes, and if Pilate had been a good man—or even a better man than he was—he would have caught at it. A good man, a true man, even if he knew no more than Pilate did who his prisoner really was, would certainly have waited—as Pilate did *not* wait—for an answer. For who will deny that this is a very question of questions, "What is Truth?"

Why, my brethren, seekers after Truth, lovers of the Truth, labourers in the cause of Truth, champions on the side of Truth, martyrs for the Truth, these are the very salt of the earth ; and in all ages, all men worthy of the name have recognised the fact and allowed that it is so. Men who care nothing for Truth are a menace and a danger to the world.

Now Pilate had heard the subject of Truth debated. Some of those who discussed it were in deadly earnest. Others were hardly more than languidly amused by it. Pilate was among these latter—the shallow, sneering, indifferent ones. To Pilate it was just a conundrum, and nothing more ; and, as such, he, for his part, had “ given it up ! ” But a true man would never have done that. A true man would never rest till he had found an answer to the question, or, at least, believed that he had found it.

Well, here was Pilate's chance. A true man would have seen it and caught at it. Here was One Who, as His very enemies allowed, “ spake as never man spake ”—One who “ taught with authority ”—a beautiful, blameless, attractive character. Pilate himself feels and knows this. He knows perfectly well that in order to get up even the semblance of a trial, His enemies must

manufacture charges, and bribe base, worthless creatures to swear falsely against Him. Well, this holy, blameless One speaks with the calm, unfaltering voice of authority about—what? About *Truth*! How eagerly would an earnest, truth-loving man have caught at the opportunity! Here was one who might settle the much-debated point for ever!

But no! Pilate merely says, "What is Truth?" and drops the subject immediately. The simple fact being that Pilate is not on the side of Truth. He cares nothing about it. He understands *expediency*. He knows the value of *compromise*. He can appreciate dexterous diplomacy and clever moral gymnastics, by means of which a pitfall may be avoided and a success scored. But *Truth*! To what practical use can Truth be put? Is Truth likely to extricate him from the position of extreme difficulty in which he even now finds himself? Is Truth going to justify him, later on, with Cæsar? Will Truth shut the mouths of these hateful, clamouring Jews? Will it end this troublesome crisis and leave him in peace? Truth! Why, no one even knows what it means! Truth! "What *is* Truth?" A mere empty phrase. At any rate, he can see no connection between Truth and *policy*.

"Pilate saith unto Him, What is Truth? and

when he had said this, he went out." "Jesting Pilate," one has called him; while another commentator speaks of his "genteel indifference." Well, my brethren, whatever his frame of mind, let us avoid his example in one respect at least—let us be patient and wait for an answer to a question so tremendous as this.

Oh! my brothers, ask the question if you will; but ask it in all sobriety and earnestness—never merely as a smart question, calculated to puzzle and to put to confusion those who are at least trying to bear witness for God; to make the world brighter, happier, better. Do not imagine that a few sneering phrases have disposed of the matter for ever. And if you ask, "What is Truth?" ask it as a very question of life and death; and then, in common fairness and honesty, be patient, and wait for an answer.

Sermon XVII

A SOCIETY CONUNDRUM

ST. JOHN xviii. 38

Pilate saith unto Him, What is Truth ?

“ THERE is nothing new under the sun ! ”

And so, whatever may have been the spirit in which Pilate put this question, that same spirit, you may depend upon it, is abroad in the world this very hour. Did he ask it sneeringly, contemptuously, impatiently ? Well, hundreds are asking it sneeringly, contemptuously, impatiently, to-day.

Did he speak wearily, sadly, hopelessly ? Was Truth to him a mere will-o'-the-wisp of the philosophers—a matter for academic discussion, but no subject for busy practical men to trouble their heads about ? Well, hundreds think of it in the same way to-day.

Did he belong to the Pyrrhonist school ? the school which laid it down that no one could possibly

answer such a question as "What is Truth?" for the simple reason that nobody knew or could know? Well, you will find the Pyrrhonist going about the world to-day under the name of the agnostic, and with very much the same words upon his lips. For "The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be, and there is nothing new under the sun."

"Pilate saith unto Him, What is Truth?" But Pilate in all probability went down to his grave with the question, as far as he was concerned, unanswered. Not because it was unanswerable, but because he was unworthy of an answer. And thousands thus go down to the grave to-day because they, like Pilate, are unworthy also. Unworthy because they are *not on the side of Truth*. God's "Word is Truth." The Bible declares God's will to man and God's Truth. But the Bible is a very uncomfortable book to the man who prefers an evil to a good life, an unclean to a clean. There are people to whom the best news you could give them would be the news that the Bible had been proved to be a forgery, a huge deception, a bare-faced fraud. They would rejoice exceedingly if it could be shown that the evidence for Christianity had broken down; that the religion of Jesus Christ had been tested and found to be false; that it had been weighed in the

balance of genuineness and truth, and been found wanting. And why? Because these people "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." As one such plainly said, "Ah! then (that is if religion be all a lie and a sham) I may drink, and cheat, and blaspheme, and defy the parson."

But, all the while, I am very sure there is something within even these that whispers and says, "Ah! but in spite of philosophers, and critics, and wise men, Christianity *is* what it claims to be; it *is* true, *and you know it.*" Yes, they do know it. A lady once congratulated Voltaire on having got rid of Hell. "Ah, madam," he replied, "*I wish I had!*" Still, these people are not on the side of Truth. And to those who are not on the side of Truth the answer will not be given. They will "walk on still in darkness."

Then, like Pilate, others are unworthy because, like him, they do not choose to *wait for an answer*; the shallow, flippant, frivolous characters who have adopted the rôle of *smart objectors*. These do not *want* an answer. All they want is the glory and the cheap applause of putting what they imagine to be staggering "puzzlers" to the Christian apologist. They are quite content to raise a laugh, and to make an opponent look foolish, and to treat the whole matter as a fine joke. "I say, master, can

you tell me the way to Heaven ? ” said one of these would-be facetious ones. He did not expect an answer, and he did not want one ; nevertheless he got one in the quick reply, “ Yes, take the first turning *to the right* and keep straight on.”

Now there is nothing admirable, my brethren, in this rôle of objector. It is a cheap and easy one, for any one can *object*. It does not need any brains to make objections ; but it is quite another thing to be ready to furnish something better, truer, wiser than that to which you have objected. But this is just what the objector is never ready with. He can take away, but he cannot give anything in exchange. He can pull down but he cannot build up.

My brothers, never condescend to this attitude of the mere clever objector. “ Clever men,” said Carlyle, “ are as common as blackberries ; the difficulty is to find a *good* one ! ” It is not the mere clever people who are the salt of the earth. Cleverness is not going to help you to face the trials and temptations and to bear the burdens and sorrows of life. Do not mistake flippancy for cleverness even. Wait for an answer to your puzzles and difficulties. Truth is not to be found without much labour and travail. It is not the mere power of recognising a problem when you meet it that is to

be commended ; it is the patient working out of it and finding the solution. "What is better than seeking for truth," cried a loud-voiced, secularist lecturer. "Why finding it, of course," was the quiet yet obvious retort.

Then let us just glance for a moment at the position of the agnostic with respect to the question, "What is Truth ?" There is a certain semblance of humility in his position. "Do not," he says, "ask yourself or any one else what you can know about God, the soul, and a future state. These matters are unknowable, and you had better be humble (as I am) and acknowledge that they are." In reference to this state of mind it may be remarked that we can only assert the unknown to be unknowable on the assumption (surely anything but a humble one !) that we know all that can be known. "If it be true," says a writer,* "that God cannot be known by man, it will be the last truth that man will ever learn !" "Is it the case," asks Dr. Salmon, "that all who now call themselves agnostics are entitled to claim the superiority to other men which their theory implies ? I think not. I believe the true type of these agnostics to be the sailors of Columbus, who begged and implored him to turn his ship round, confident as they were that he was

* Rev. E. J. Hardy, "Doubt and Faith."

on a path on which nothing could be found. But this confidence arose from no philosophic knowledge that investigation must be fruitless. It was nothing but indolent impatience of the toil of search, inability to recognise the tokens of success which had already presented themselves, incapacity to share the scientific faith in things unseen, which assured their master that if they would but persevere in the way by which he led them they should certainly reach the land of promise which lay beyond."

"What is Truth?" Let Him who is the Truth tell us. "Sanctify them through Thy Truth; Thy word is Truth." And God's word reveals God to man. It shows us that God is Love; that He will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." But it reveals to us as clearly that God hates sin; that He would have us cleansed and freed from all sin; that we cannot do this of ourselves, but that the Holy Spirit can make men pure, if they will let Him. It teaches us that sin can be overcome; that it is no excuse to cry out about "poor, weak human nature." Jesus Christ took that nature upon Him. He has regenerated it, and we are no longer weak—we are strong!

All this is God's Truth. God has revealed it to us by His dear Son. It is for us to hold fast by that

blessed revelation ; to walk as those who have been brought out of darkness into light ; out of the bondage of Satan into the glorious liberty of the Children of God !

Sermon XVIII

THE BETTER WAY

I SAMUEL xv. 22

To obey is better than sacrifice.

It is impossible not to pity, even while we feel that we must condemn, the unhappy Saul for that foolish and wicked act of disobedience related in this chapter. How quickly are all the bright prospects with which his reign opened beginning to fade away, through the blind self-will and the rebellious folly of the erring king !

Only two short years had he been on the throne when he was guilty of an impious act of offering sacrifice ; and to this sin he now adds this act of rebellion and deliberate disobedience in sparing the king of the Amalekites and in allowing his people to spare the best of the cattle and the spoil in direct violation of the express commands of Almighty God. The false and feeble excuse which he puts forward

in extenuation of his act does but make his case the worse, and even supposing his motives to have been the best and most honest, could he hope to find acceptance with the Almighty while solemnly offering to Him the fruits of his sin and disobedience?

“Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams!” Such is the stern answer of the prophet, followed by the still more stern and terrible sentence: “Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”

Alas! for King Saul, bent on his own sure destruction. Alas! for all the fair promise with which his reign had opened! Alas! that the sun which rose upon that reign in hope and joy and a nation’s wild enthusiasm and shouts of joy—in that day when, “little in his own sight,” he stood among his people, and heard the loyal cry, “God save the king!”—alas! that that sun must set in hopelessness and blood and anguish on the mountains of Gilboa!

For already the sentence has gone out. Already God has chosen a man after His own heart to be king in Saul’s stead—David, the fresh-faced, fresh-souled lad, tending his flocks on the hills of Bethlehem.

Brethren, are you inclined to say that Saul's punishment was out of all proportion to the sin he committed? Do you urge that his was but an error of judgment—an error, too, on the side of mercy? Then I answer, "Nay! it was no such thing. It was an act of deliberate rebellion against God, prompted by motives altogether unworthy; though Saul had, indeed, the hardihood to try and brazen the matter out before Samuel.

But even supposing his motives to have been the best, can good intentions justify or stand as an excuse for wilful disobedience? Did God pass sentence on Saul because he was merely a *weak* man, a tender-hearted conqueror, wanting in martial ardour, foolishly merciful? No! but *here* you have the ground of Saul's condemnation in these words of God's prophet, "Because thou *hast rejected the Lord*, He hath also rejected thee!"

Saul was not the first man nor the last who has come into condemnation, not because he was hearty, liberal, kind-hearted, but in spite of all these good qualities, because he also set himself in direct antagonism to God.

Brethren, to obey God—to carry out simply, loyally, that which He commands, is better than seeking about to offer to Him some sacrifice which

He has never asked at our hands. "To obey is better than sacrifice."

"Order was Heaven's first law" we have been told. Well, without obedience you can have no such thing as order. Obedience to fixed existing laws is at the foundation of all order in the universe, at the root of all harmony, whether in nature, in society, or in religion. Obedience is absolutely essential to the happiness and well-being of all Creation.

In obedience to the laws that govern them, the planets, tides, and seasons keep their perfect course. Were it not for this perfect obedience, life on this globe of ours would be impossible; terrible convulsions of Nature would be the immediate result.

By obedience to the laws which govern the universe (all laws of God) we propel our locomotives and steamships; we flash our messages along the wire or cable; we light up our cities; we work our machinery with safety, ease, and precision. When we defy Nature's laws, then suffering is the sure and swift result—as in the fever which comes from the filthy cesspit or the neglected drain.

Obedience, again, is at the foundation of every military system of the world—without it an army becomes a dangerous rabble and a terror, instead of a safeguard to the community.

Were it not for obedience to certain recognised rules in society, social life would be simply impossible and unbearable. Obedience lies at the foundation of all harmony, whether in the family, in the nation, or in the Church.

“To obey is better than sacrifice” because the very thing which makes sacrifice acceptable to God is the fact that it is an act of obedience. Remember that it was an act of disobedience which made sacrifice necessary at all.

An act of disobedience first wrought ruin on the earth. What harm was there in eating of a particular kind of fruit? The sin lay in disobedience, and defiance of an express command of God; in rebellion against Him. What makes it unlawful for a man to snare a hare in England while he may do so with impunity in the Australian bush? There he violates no statute, he disregards no law; here, he sets the law at defiance, and is punished as a poacher.

So the essence of sin lies in this, that all sin is a setting of ourselves against God, and in opposing ourselves to His will.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter, then, for us? It is that God requires us simply, unquestioningly, to hear His voice, and to obey it. We need never be casting about for some “more excel-

lent way.” Here is the best and safest way—the way of *obedience*. “If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments.”

God says to a man, “You are indulging in a particular sin, and that sin will be your eternal ruin ! You must give it up.” And the man says, “Lord ! this thing has become a necessity to me. Why must I give it up ? Will not some sacrifice at my hands please Thee as well ? Lo ! I will build a church, I will found an orphanage, I will feed the hungry and clothe the naked. And then may I not count upon everlasting life, even though I go on indulging my one special sin ? ” And what is God’s answer to such a man. “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord ? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice ! ”

There is no way of honouring God like obeying His voice—nothing is more acceptable with Him than loyal obedience to His will.

“Fear God, and keep His commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man ! ”

Sermon XIX

A GRUDGING SUBMISSION

NUMBERS xxii. 34

And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned ; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me : Now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

NEVER was there a more impudent attempt made to pass base coin for sterling money than this brazen tender on the part of Balaam to the angel of the Lord, of his sham repentance, with its hollow, worthless ring.

“ I have sinned ; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me ; now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again ! ” This is making a virtue of necessity with a vengeance ! Balaam has obstinately determined to follow a certain path, and he never talks of going back till he finds that path effectually barred against him. “ I will go back,” he says ; but he only says it when he recognises the utter hopelessness of going forward. “ I

have sinned.” That is true enough ; he *has* sinned, and he has known it all along. But he has shown no disposition to admit the fact—no hesitation about going on and persevering in his sinful course. All his anxiety so far has been to press on as fast as possible with the messengers of Balak, and to secure the promised reward of riches and honour and power—the prize which has dazzled him, and for the sake of which he has placed himself in conflict with God.

And now God Himself stands in the way against him, and compels him to halt. Balaam would never have halted of his own accord. He is forced to stop ; and, impatient of the least delay, the peevish man (with the unreasoning ill-temper that quarrelling with one’s own conscience so often begets) vents his wrath upon the patient beast that carries him, until his eyes are opened to see the angel of the Lord standing in the way against him. This is an “adversary” he cannot resist. It is hopeless to fight against *him*. And then, and only then, Balaam in his helplessness begins to talk of going back—then only, when he cannot help himself ; when, do what he will, he simply *cannot* go forward.

He tries indeed to assume the penitent, chastened air of a repentant man—“I have sinned,” he says ; “I will get me back again !”

But it is in reality only a grudging, grumbling

submission to circumstances which have proved too strong for him. "I have sinned!" But he had better have left those words out. They are not sincere words. He does not mean them. They have a hollow ring.

"I have sinned!" But Balaam is not convinced of sin. His is only the disappointed, angry feeling of the player who sees that he has made a false move and thrown away the game.

King Saul, on a memorable occasion, was more honest in speech, "I have played the fool," was his confession, "and erred exceedingly." Balaam knows and feels that he has been a very fool; but he will not say so. He is a man whose distinguishing characteristic it is to go crooked. He has always been a man of tricks, and arts, and he cannot wholly divest himself of the rôle of trickster even now. Now, as always, his words are better than his deeds. His professions and protestations have always been admirable, but his actions have, as uniformly, given the lie to his admirable sentiments.

So it is in this case. He makes a desperate attempt to palm off a sham as something real and genuine. "I have sinned!" and then he offers to go back. But it is, transparently, the offer of one who hopes that he will not be taken at his word. How grudging, how ungracious, how insincere the offer is, is

betrayed by that parenthesis with which he almost unconsciously slips—"If it displease thee!"

"If it displease thee!" As though he did not *know* that his action in this matter, from first to last, was utterly displeasing to God.

Balaam had been face to face with his conscience already about it all; and his conscience had told him so. But the man was a moral juggler. He had juggled with his conscience, and he had been pretending *not* to know that God's very permission, "Go with the men," had been a judicial permission, given in sorrow and in anger, because God saw that his heart was set upon going.

And so this man of tricks and shams parades a sham repentance now, and holds out a sham and worthless offer—"I will get me back again!" But God will have no shams—the hollow ring of the base counterfeit coin is utterly hateful to Him. He will not accept it. "I will get me back again," says Balaam. Does God require a man's mere bodily service and mechanical obedience when his heart is far from Him? No! He will take no such service as that. God has no need of grudging, unwilling obedience which a man has no choice but to render.

"I will get me back again!" Well, let us suppose for a moment that his offer had been accepted, and that he had turned about and gone back. What

then? Why then, more than ever, his *heart* would have been at the court of Balak, with the riches and rewards that had been his cherished dream. He would have gone back a grumbling, discontented, aggrieved, and injured man, feeling that he had been cheated out of his due: out of those honours and advantages for which his great qualifications singularly fitted him. And so his palpably insincere offer is at once rejected. "Go with the men," is once more the answer he gets; and the hollowness of Balaam's protestation is proved by the readiness with which he seizes upon the permission given him, and goes upon his way.

My brethren, do we never feel ourselves aggrieved and oppressed by the wise laws of God and the wholesome restrictions He has seen good to place upon our lives and actions? There are some things which, in our hearts, we are set upon doing, and which we only refrain from carrying out because we lack the opportunity, or because the Christian conscience of the day on these particular matters is, as yet, too strong for us. Secretly we are hoping, all the while, that time will work a change; that the public conscience of the world generally will weigh down and overcome the strict religious conscience, and that that will be, by common consent, allowed, which is for the time being forbidden.

Well, let no man take credit to himself who is only rendering obedience to God and to his own conscience, then, under protest. A grudging, chafing obedience has no value in His eyes. He will accept no such service as that. It is like Balaam's offer to go back, and it is an offer that will be rejected. The upshot of it will be that we shall, after all, go forward on our own way, but it will be upon a road that leads but to one end—and that end is destruction.

Sermon XX

WHAT "GETTING BACK AGAIN" MEANS

NUMBERS xxii. 34

I have sinned . . . now therefore . . . I will get me back again.

THERE is hope for the man who recognises his fault ; who, like a man, admits it, and who bravely announces his determination to get him back again—to retrace his steps and make amends for his wrongdoing. We can never despair of such a man as that. Low as he may have fallen, far as he may have wandered, there is always hope of his recovery.

Now these words of Balaam, "I have sinned . . . now therefore . . . I will get me back again," sound like the utterance of just such a brave, straight, manly man. Then why are we not satisfied with his words ? Why are we still suspicious of him ? Why do we not believe in his protestations ? Well, because we *know the man*, and the circumstances

under which the words were forced from him. We believe in repentance; we do *not* believe in any spurious imitation of it.

Now what is repentance?

Well, repentance has been described as a "right about turn." And is not that exactly what Balaam literally proposes to do; to turn his back upon the road which he had foolishly and rebelliously set out upon, and to get him "back again?" Yes, but unfortunately such a thing never so much as occurred to him till the necessity was absolutely forced upon him. There is no virtue in necessity. The man who halts in his sinful course simply because he dare not go on, because he is afraid to continue in it, has not repented. Repentance is not a matter of expediency; it is not born of worldly wisdom. Repentance is a change of heart, and is the outcome of strong, deep conviction.

Drunkards have been known to sign the pledge in India, and to keep it, simply because they have been afraid to drink. They were convinced that death, sure and swift, was the certain penalty of hard drinking in the Indian climate. But then these men had not repented. Abstinence with them was a mere matter of expediency, and as soon as they landed on English soil again they broke their pledge. To talk about "going back again" only

150 What "Getting Back Again" Means

when we cannot, and dare not, go forward, is not Repentance.

And now I want to consider for a moment this important question, *When* may a man repent? (I do not say when *should* he, but when *may* he?) I suppose most people would answer readily enough, "Why, at any time! Whenever and wherever he chooses. God will not reject him. God is always ready to receive and shelter the penitent."

Now that, I am bound to warn you, is a mistake, and a very deadly one. That is a doctrine which the devil has led many to believe, to their utter destruction. We may *not* bid God wait *our* time. We may *not* begin to talk about getting us back again just whenever we choose to do so. If we have ever convinced ourselves that we *may* do so, then we have also (I feel quite sure) very definitely settled with ourselves *when* that repentance will begin.

And though we may never have said it openly or in so many words, yet secretly in our inmost hearts we have said, "It will be when I am old; when I have thoroughly enjoyed life, and got all I can out of it; when I have had my fill of sin and have grown tired of it. Then I will begin to turn my thoughts to other things; to get me back again, and to prepare for the end which will be fast draw-

What "Getting Back Again" Means 151

ing near. Then I will 'think upon God'; then I will repent, and turn to Him."

But now, *will* we do it, do you think? Will we thus get us back again? No, we will not. For, in the first place, repentance does not wait upon a man's mere beck and call; it does not spring up to order. And, in the second place, God will not accept repentance which has been carefully timed to suit our own convenience. "Now," He says, "is the accepted time." And again, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

"I will get me back again." Ah! that is just one of those things that is so easily said but is never easily done. It is only when a man begins to set about it, when he begins to try to get him back again that he finds how hard (how impossible even in some cases) this getting back really is.

For, first of all, it means going back upon everything to which, by long use, he has grown accustomed; it means the breaking off of habits that have become second nature to him. Is that ever an easy matter? Just set yourself to break off but one habit (not necessarily a bad one even) which has grown upon you, and see what it means. "I will get me

152 What "Getting Back Again" Means

back again" is a thing more easily said than done.

Then, a man's pride and self-esteem often make it well-nigh impossible for him to go back. Self-esteem is a powerful factor in determining a man's life and actions. It was an easy thing enough for Balaam to say, "I will get me back again"; but do you think he would have done it? I doubt it. His pride and self-esteem would have risen up to bar the way against him. Just think what that going back would have meant in his case. And, to understand it, you must first of all think what his setting out with the princes of Balak had been. It was just such a brave show, a gorgeous display, as Balaam's heart loved—the barbaric splendour of the glittering procession of princes and chieftains and warriors. And the central figure of all that splendid cavalcade was Balaam himself! Balaam the seer; Balaam the mystic; Balaam the mighty wizard, invested (in the minds of the ignorant and superstitious) with all those strange and awful powers which communion with the unseen world was supposed to bestow upon a man.

Thus it was that he had passed through the crowd of bowing, obsequious domestics, out among the wayfarers on the great high-road to Moab—a man courted and flattered because he was feared.

What "Getting Back Again" Means 153

Then imagine that man turning back again, baffled, dejected, beaten ! No great and mighty one after all, but just an impudent pretender, whose mask had been torn off him, whose pretensions had been pitilessly exposed, and himself ignominiously driven back amid the laughter and jeers of those who had believed in him and trembled before him. Balaam was not the man to face such an ordeal as that—the puzzled wonderment of the whole country side ; the smiles and whisperings of his own servants !

Well, just ask yourself whether you would find it an easy thing, or a welcome, to confess yourself wrong, beaten, humiliated, to those in whose eyes you had always been a hero and a demi-god.

"I will get me back again," a man says ; but when the time comes to go back he is terrified and discouraged by the prospect that awaits him—by the *loneliness* of the road he must travel. He has long been the centre of a gay, heedless throng, a favourite with his boon companions ; his appearance in their midst has always been greeted with shouts of welcome. But he sees himself "going back," a solitary, limping, hesitating, pitiable figure. Instead of the shouts of welcome, only jeers and the mocking laughter of the companions he has forsaken are in his ears. He who used to be their oracle is

154 What "Getting Back Again" Means

now only the subject of the latest joke and the topical song.

My brothers, do not delude yourselves ; do not let Satan delude you, as you set out upon a course of godless, vicious living, with the picture of a day when you will halt and turn about and get you back again to a good, clean, Christian life.

You have not counted the cost ! You do not know what "going back" means ! In one sense indeed, it is impossible to go back. You cannot go back again to innocence, to a conscience void of offence. In any sense it is a hard, a bitter experience—harder, more bitter, than many have the courage to face. Resist the tempter now. Refuse to listen to him now. Be not persuaded to set out upon a road along which you may learn, to your cost, there is, for you at any rate, no such thing as going back at all !

Sermon XXI

THE IMPERISHABLE PAST

EZEK. xvi. 61

Then thou shalt remember.

“ THEN ”—when perhaps thou wouldst give worlds to forget ! but when forgetfulness will be impossible ; when oblivion will not come, either at thine imperious bidding or in answer to thine agonised appeal.

It is the merciful warning given to man by the good God who has endowed him with a faculty and bestowed upon him a power which is sternly retributive and benignly consolatory according to the whole tenor and complexion of his every-day life—the power of memory.

We speak sometimes of certain things—words, events, impressions—as being “graven on the tablets of our memory.” Well, my brethren, we use something more than a mere figure of speech when we do so. Memory, indeed, is a sensitive

surface of the soul which is continually receiving impressions—good, bad, and indifferent—which are for the most part indelible ; which nothing can ever efface, which no effort of ours is strong enough to destroy.

“ Don’t write there ! ” was the caution given to a thoughtless man who was about to scratch some words on the polished surface of a mirror. “ Don’t write there ! ” “ Why not ? ” was the astonished reply. “ Because,” said the first speaker, “ you can’t rub it out ! ”

“ You can’t rub it out ! ” Let the words ring in our ears also ; let them sink deep down into our hearts. There comes a time when we would give anything to forget what we have said, or done, or thought, because it shames us to remember. But we cannot forget them, do what we will. They will not be rubbed out. And the very effort to forget, the very determination to bury them out of sight, makes forgetfulness impossible. “ You put by an article of your experience,” says a writer, “ and you say that it is proscribed, debarred from your remembrance. You say, ‘ I never wish to see that again ; let it be buried for ever and forgotten.’ It may be but a single word, or deed, or look ; but it will not be forgotten ; it will not be buried. The very label you put upon it, ‘ Never to be revealed ’ ;

the very burial service you perform over it ; the very act of your will, consigning it to everlasting oblivion—these very things secure its eternal existence and power over you. Your unwillingness to look at it compels you to look. Your dread and unwillingness give it, in fact, an additional, morbid, torturing action within you and attraction over you. Hatred is in some respects a stronger bond than friendship. What we hate and dread we remember with a dreadful energy, and so long as the hatred and dread exist the object of it cannot be forgotten.”

Let us be careful, then, my brethren, what we commit to our memory for its safe and eternal keeping. If we commit to it that which is evil and shameful, then memory will rise up as an avenger, to sting us with the bitter lash of remembrance in the days that are to come. This has been the terrible experience of many who have lived to mourn the past. Some of the best and holiest men, even in the depths of penitence, have been haunted through life by the memory of early sin. To the guilty soul nothing will be more dreadful, more hateful, in the future life than the remembrance of those hideous evil experiences which were once its delight and joy. Memory is eternal ! There is of course such a thing as forgetfulness, but over against that we must place the fact that things forgotten at one time are

remembered at another, so that we may fairly conclude that nothing is ever completely lost by the soul.

How often, too, have we been startled by the sudden, distinct remembrance of some long-past, trivial event which we had supposed to have utterly perished from our memory. And so I say again, let us be very careful what we write upon that sensitive surface, because we "can't rub it out!"

"Then thou shalt remember!" It is the teaching of modern science that no force is lost in the universe. It may be changed into other forces, but its equivalent is perpetuated. Heat becomes motion, and motion, arrested, becomes heat. Hence every change in the universe must affect every part of the universe. The jar of the present moment shakes the world, and (say some scientists) all worlds. "By your voice you set in motion currents of air which meet on the other side of the globe. No man can speak blasphemy or foulness, even in secret, without having the whole universe for an audience." Nothing is lost in the hard domain of matter. Is it likely that anything is lost in the sensitive realm of mind?

The mental history of our life is not lost—it is dormant at the most, and it needs but some shock strong enough to bring all the past to life.

People who have been rescued from drowning

have told how, in that supreme moment when life has practically ceased and when the spirit was on the very point of departure, all the scroll of their past lives was suddenly unfolded before them with a deliberate and awful distinctness. Each act, each event, stood clearly out in its own proper place, and, more wonderful still, each with its own moral value, each with its own proper significance, attached.

The sound of the Last Trump, the summons to appear before the Bar of Christ, will be just such a shock. What a moment that will be when, with his memory thus quickened, a man shall hear the Judge say to him, "Now go—go apart. Take thy life with thee—read it over. See what thou hast done with it!"

"Then thou shalt remember!" Therefore it behoves us to ask with what material we are now storing it, for upon this must its retributive or its consolatory power, in the great Hereafter, depend. The old-world fable placed Lethe (the river of forgetfulness) between earth and the happy plains of Elysium. Whosoever drank of the waters of that river forgot all his past. Even the heathen understood that there could be no happiness hereafter unless memory let go its hold of past sins!

God warns us, my brethren, because God is more merciful to us than we are to ourselves. He would

save us from the anguish of painful remembrance. He would have us learn that the past, though left behind, is yet, in a sense, ever present with us ; for memory remains with us in time, and memory will continue with us even when Time shall be no longer, "Beware !" God says to us, "Stop ! Reflect ! Do not write hastily on the tablets of your memory an autobiography which it will shame and pain you to remember hereafter. Pause, ere you write anything there, because once it is written 'you cannot rub it out !' "

Sermon XXII

THE STRONG MAN'S WEAKNESS

ST. JOHN xiii. 37

Peter said unto Him, Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now ?
I will lay down my life for Thy sake.

YOU may have noticed how often it happens that a man who has in him much that is altogether admirable and excellent, possesses also, in a very marked degree, the defects of his good qualities. St. Peter's is a case in point.

No one who reads his story can help seeing that he was a man who possessed many splendid qualities. He was devoted, brave, sincere. But his very devotion became a source of weakness ; for, knowing how sincerely he loved his Master, and remembering that fact alone, he forgot that his loyalty had never been put to any severe strain and test.

His very sincerity caused him to fall an easy prey to the deceitfulness of the human heart, and his very courage made him overweeningly rash and

162 The Strong Man's Weakness

self-confident ; and such confidence, as we often find out for ourselves, is sadly misplaced.

This, then, is the first thing we notice about St. Peter. He is, in many ways, a grand man, but he is also a man who has, in a marked degree, the defects of his good qualities.

Then there is another thing we shall do well to bear in mind as we read his story, and it is this : that a man's surroundings, the character of his trade or calling, the very nature of the climate in which he is reared, have much to do in turning him out the type of man you find him. All these things go a long way towards developing his character, towards bringing out excellences that are latent in him, or towards accentuating his natural defects or weaknesses. So, when you come to think of it, St. Peter, the hardy fisherman, is just the sort of man to speak (and to mean) such words as these, " Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now ? I will lay down my life for Thy sake."

To a man who is constantly called to face danger, to take his life in his hands, another danger more or less is not a matter to be taken much account of, especially when he is called to face it for the sake of one to whom his whole heart's devotion is given.

" They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters ; these men see

the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep." Their experience is such as to make men still, and know that the Lord is God Almighty. And when the contemplation makes them—as thank God it often does—true-hearted, brave, God-fearing men, then you find them men of true heroic breed, and among the very best that the world produces.

But, in any case, the life of a fisherman, the loneliness of it often, the hardness he is called to endure, the wild perils he must face, all tend to make him the sturdy, self-reliant, self-contained man you generally find him. And, indeed, he needs to be a man of stout heart, and iron nerve, and enduring frame as he toils and labours to snatch a precarious living from the hungry, treacherous waves. How often, in the rage and blackness of the tempest, is he called to look death in the face; when running for the shore, the blinding spray in his face, the roar of winds and waters in his ears, he knows that the chances are all against his ever making the shore again.

Such a life can hardly fail to make a man resolute, self-dependent, strong and still. Well, it is a man with a training like that who says, "Lord . . . I will lay down my life for Thy sake!"

To Peter, inured as he was to a life of hardship and of danger, it seemed the most natural thing in

164 The Strong Man's Weakness

the world that he should follow his Master anywhere, at any moment, under any circumstances. Was the path the Saviour was henceforth called to tread more than usually rugged, steep, and weary? Well, what of that? The fisherman-disciple has never been accustomed to a life of softness and ease. Why should he not follow the Saviour *now*?

Or was it to be something more than toilsome, hard, and rugged? Was actual danger to life and limb to be looked for upon that path? Well, St. Peter has looked death straight in the face many a time and oft! What is danger to him? Why cannot he follow now?

But his Master's words show him that it is the road of death he has even now begun to tread; that the end is almost in sight. Well, St. Peter has never set such a value upon his own life that, in order to safeguard it, he is going to forsake his Master now! "Let it be even so—I am ready; I will lay down my life for Thy sake!"

Yes, and he means it! Peter is no hypocrite. A man of that sort very seldom is. No, he is no hypocrite—but he is sadly self-deceived. He shows the defects of his good qualities. Because he is so devoted to Jesus Christ, and knows it, he is rash; he forgets that his loyalty has not yet been put to the test. Because he is honest and knows it, he

forgets that the heart is treacherous ; he fails to reckon with its deceitfulness. Because he is full of courage, and perfectly ready to face danger, he becomes absolutely boastful and self-confident.

It is not God's humble servant, leaning hard on Him, but it is just himself—Peter—the man of iron, against the worst that can befall. “Why cannot I . . . I am ready to lay down my life !”

Ah ! my brethren, what sad reading some of the later chapters of our life-stories become by the light of the vows, the words, the promises of earlier pages ! The man—the honest, loving disciple—who utters these brave words is the same man who a few short hours afterwards is denying that he ever knew the Saviour, and is backing his shameful denial with oaths and curses ! “I know Him not ! I am none of His ! He is nothing to me ! I don't even know what you are talking about ! *I* a friend of Jesus of Nazareth ? *I* with Him in the garden ? On my solemn oath, it is false ! I don't know that I ever saw this man before !”

“Lord, I will lay down my life for Thy sake !”
“Lord, I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death !” “Lord, though all should deny Thee, yet will *I* never !”

Mark the words well, my brethren ! Learn the lesson they teach us. At every stage you have the

166 The Strong Man's Weakness

capital I ! It is always "I !" It is never, "By God's help I will try," but it is just, "I, Peter, who will do it !" This is the great and obvious defect in St. Peter's character. So it is in many another character, lovable, full of fine qualities. Self-confidence ! Satan rejoices over, loves to mark, the self-confident, boastful man.

Then self-confidence begets *self-esteem*, and self-esteem is seldom proof against ridicule. It fills one with a perfect horror of looking foolish. Well, I don't say that a man should wish to look foolish, or to cut a poor figure ; but I do say that it is sometimes the choice between that and denying our Lord !

The Saviour in the High Priest's palace was made the sport of fools. He was an object of derision, spitted on, impudently hustled, jeered at. St. Peter, with his enormous self-confidence had also a large share of self-esteem. It was one thing to stand up bravely for His Master and to strike a blow for Him in the face of an armed mob in Gethsemane. It was quite another thing to stand tamely by the fire among these town-bred, supercilious servants of the High Priest and to be pointed out as the friend of the despised Nazarene, who, amid peals of laughter and coarse jests, is being pushed about, insulted, mobbed !

How could he stand it ? These men with their

cold, disdainful looks—this giggling servant-girl with the mischief in her eyes ready to egg them on to take *him* in hand, and insult *him* also !

Other men have gone through something of the same kind—men, who have been brave even to rashness when there was danger to be faced, or a swaggering bully to be put down, have become cowards when a woman has laughed at them.

Then again, St. Peter's trial came suddenly, and in such an unlooked-for shape. When he understood that danger, for his Master's sake, was to be expected, his spirits rose. He was eager to meet it. But who could have supposed that the trial would take such a form as this ! Here was no danger to be faced, as *he* understood danger ! No hard blows to be given or taken ! He never looked for this—this mean unheroic setting—a chilly courtyard, some shivering servants, and a chattering servant-girl !

And many a man has been taken just as suddenly—has failed under a trial just as trivial. Many a man whose heart is stout enough in a gale of wind, who will fight out a hurricane in the wild North Sea with a scarcely quickened pulse, is cowed by a storm of "chaff" from his fellow men, and breaks down under a coarse shout from the taproom of his village inn.

We have often sat in complacent judgment upon

168 The Strong Man's Weakness

St. Peter ; we have despised him for his denial ; we have wondered at the strong man's weakness ! But let us look at home. Have we never broken down, and with much smaller excuse than he had ? After all, we are in no danger of life and limb through confessing the Lord Jesus Christ. But Peter had not much tenderness or mercy to expect from the crowd that night, insubordinate as it was, and ripe for any mischief.

God forgive us ! We have denied the Master too. We have held our peace when we should have spoken out. We have joined in evil, because we have been afraid to be labelled " pious ! " We have done these things without the love and devotion which did mark St. Peter's service of Jesus Christ, and without the genuine lifelong repentance which was his, and that faithfulness unto death which at last won for him the martyr's crown !

Sermon XXIII

LOOKING UP TO GOD

PSALM v. 3

I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up.

THERE is one subject, and one only, which these words obviously suggest. As you hear them, you know you are going to have a sermon on prayer. "Men ought always to pray," the Old Book says; but, in these fast-moving days, the Old Book gets left far behind. There are some to whom its time-honoured teachings and precepts have long been old-fashioned and out of date; and by whom it has long been consigned to the dust and cobwebs of that lumber-room of the dead-and-gone ages, to which alone, in their opinion, it properly belongs.

Well, it is on an old-fashioned subject I am going to speak to you to-day—the subject of prayer. And my only trouble is that I feel how very little

I am qualified to treat a matter so vast and so important as it ought to be treated. But I take courage and consolation in the thought that God has Himself preached this sermon to you already. He has preached it through yourselves, and by yourselves. After all, you are, yourselves, the very best sermon on prayer! For God has created you, body, soul, and spirit; and in each of these constituent parts of your triple nature you are, every one, living proofs of, and witnesses to, the instinct of prayer, the naturalness of prayer, and the duty of prayer.

Body, soul, and spirit!

What is meant by the body—the material form in which the immaterial is clothed—we all know well enough. So I will leave that to the last.

Let us pass on to the soul. What is the soul? The soul is that immaterial part of man which constitutes his personality; it is the “ego”; the assemblage of feelings, affections, desires, which make up the individual *character*.

Now, you are conscious of this personality of yours; but you are also conscious that this your “reasonable soul” was not self-bestowed; neither was it purchased by you at a price. You derived it from a power outside of and independent of yourself. You were born with it. Its very presence,

therefore, refers you back, and links you on to the power from whence it came. That is the first thing.

Then what follows? Why this: Your very nature prompts you to get into touch with—to learn what you can about—to hold intercourse with—any one to whom you are indebted for any gifts or favour. And so there is the natural desire to hold communion with that power which has given you a soul. Hence, the very fact that the soul forms a constituent element of your being, and that you are prompted to look back and up to the power from whence it is derived, is a witness to the *naturalness* of prayer.

But a soul is not the only immaterial part of your being. You have a *spirit* also. What is the spirit? The spirit is the highest part of a man's being. It is that which was breathed by the Creator into Adam's nostrils at the beginning. It is that by which we are enabled to perform what the soul naturally prompts us to—namely, communion with our Maker. It is through the spirit that we are able to hold such communion.

If, then, we have been created with a soul which prompts us to communion with that higher power from whence it came, and with a spirit which makes such intercourse possible, it is obvious that

we were intended to use the power. Hence, in your spirit, you are a witness to the *duty* of prayer.

And then we come to the body.

Now it is merely asserting a truism, and indulging in platitude to say that the contemplation and the mechanism of the human body must beget in every thoughtful person feelings of admiration and wonder. That contemplation moved David to an outburst of praise and thanksgiving—"I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made!"

Now the same power which has bestowed upon us mental and spiritual gifts has given us bodily gifts and powers also—certain faculties, which we exercise so easily, instinctively, and (as we say) naturally, that we come to forget at last that they are gifts at all. I mean such gifts as sight, and touch, and hearing—gifts that no money on earth could buy. It is only when we have lost any of these gifts, or when we are in the presence of those to whom they have been denied, that we begin to appreciate and to value them.

Some of these gifts—such as sight and hearing—we share with the lower animals and the brute creation. But if you were asked what bodily gift there is, the possession of which raises man at once above the beasts that perish, you would answer at once—"the gift of speech." That is so. It

is in this, the use of the best member that he has, that man stands on a level high above the dumb creation. You might also instance the power of standing upright. The fact that man alone stands erect in the presence of the Creator is suggestive.

But now, have you ever considered that there is yet another bodily gift and power which man alone enjoys—which he alone has had given to him—I mean *the power of looking up; of raising his eyes to heaven?*

I would not press the point unduly, but I believe I am right in stating, as a physiological fact, that man alone instinctively and naturally looks up, while a beast only does so under strain or compulsion—never instinctively. Well, my brethren, if that be (as I believe it to be) a physiological fact, then it is, in itself, a sermon on Prayer—a sermon didactic, suggestive, practical.

Speaking of man, then, in respect of his soul, we have seen that he is a witness to the *naturalness* of Prayer; of his spirit, to the *duty* of Prayer; and now, in his body—in the bodily power which is his alone; the power *to look up*—he is a witness to the *instinct* of prayer. He alone instinctively looks up to God. “I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and *will look up.*”

And now you notice I say “looks up to God!”

So far I have spoken only of "a Power"—invisible, supreme—outside a man's self—a Power from whom he derives as free gifts, life, reason, faculties, which he cannot pretend are self-bestowed, and which he must confess all the wealth of this world could never purchase.

Well, what is the name of that Power? I only know one Name—GOD! I know, indeed, that men are put to strange shifts, and the employment of strange terms, to avoid this. I know that they will speak about a "natural order of things," "nature law"; or, let us say at once, Nature! But, I ask you, is there not a ring of unreality as well as of vagueness—an evidence of being hard-pressed—when men will say Nature, but will refuse to say GOD?

Let us clear our minds of cant! What do we mean by "Nature"? When had Nature her beginning? Who gave Nature her laws? Depend upon it when men speak of Nature they either mean nothing at all—in which case it would be better not to use meaningless terms—or *they mean God*, while they seek to veil His Majesty under the lesser term.

Here, then, I must leave this wide and wonderful subject for the present. From the beginning—*i.e.*, from the Creation of man—prayer has gone up to

God. An old-fashioned habit ! Why, yes, of course it is ! Nothing could be more old-fashioned than that which dates back to the very beginning of the race. And, therefore, "out of date ?" No ! It can only be that when humanity itself has gone out of date ! The prayerless man is a contradiction. He is one who does violence to his very nature and his being, who refuses to say " I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up."

Sermon XXIV

THE DUTY OF PRAYER

ST. LUKE xviii. 1.

Men ought always to pray.

“I AM not a praying man.” So a distinguished man of science was once reported to have said in addressing a New York audience. There was no note of anything like apology or regret in his statement ; but, if anything, a hint of something more like superiority to the feeble, lag-behind, commonplace folk who are still foolish enough to believe in prayer.

Another distinguished man, a man of profound thought and great intellect, being asked as he lay a-dying how he felt, replied, “I can pray, and that’s a great thing.” In *his* judgment prayer was the highest privilege of man ; the noblest service to which man’s intellect could give itself.

It is a sad pity, my brethren, that men should

ever be ashamed to pray, or at least to have it known that they do so ; that prayer should be regarded by some as a token of intellectual feebleness. "Men ought always to pray." Why? For the simple reason that they are men, and not mere beasts. For the simple reason that the prayerless man is a contradiction, and a negation. He is only living half—and less than half—of his life. He is a kind of "freak," like the monstrosity in some travelling show, who exhibits marvellous development in one direction and utter feebleness in another; like the man with the body of a giant and the brain of an infant. Such a man is living the merely material side of his life, in utter unconsciousness of, and so to the sure deterioration of, the far more important—the immaterial side. In him the animal side is emphasised ; the spiritual side is lost. He is living without an ideal, and the man who lives without an ideal, sinks. Therefore, "Men ought always to pray !"

And yet people are to be found who can say, and that without any shame or sense of loss and incompleteness, "We are not praying folk !" whose motto seems rather to be, "Men ought *never* to pray ; ought never so far to forget themselves and their manly dignity as to give way to any such weak and superstitious folly as prayer !"

Well now, in the words of the text you have a very downright definite statement. There is nothing hesitating, nothing apologetic about it. As clear and unmistakable as the bugle which sounds "The Advance" it rings out—the call to a duty as definite as it is unquestionable. "Men ought always to pray!"

How many do? How many obey the call? Well, a great many more, I make bold to say, than you would think—a great many more than would have you know it. A great many men are better than their words; better than their loudly expressed views and opinions; better than they would wish their comrades and associates to think them. I know men who would like to be thought desperately godless, reckless, unbelieving; but, all the same, I do not believe they are anything of the sort. They take infinite pains (why, I do not pretend to know) to hide the better part of their nature.

It is a curious thing that some men's highest ambition is to be taken for the devil's volunteers rather than soldiers of Christ. But so it is.

So do not be in a hurry to believe all that men say. Do not be in a hurry to believe that they despise prayer as much as they say they do. Such

men are often the veriest frauds. They are not half so bad as they like to make you believe.

But having said thus much, do not let us disguise from ourselves the fact that many people are troubled about, and beset with, certain difficulties in connection with prayer.

There is, for instance, that uncomfortable feeling which haunts people sometimes, in spite of themselves, of the *uselessness* of prayer—the feeling that prayer must, after all, needs be unavailing because that the whole course of the universe is finally and rigidly ordered; that the perfect mechanism and working of the whole cannot be disturbed and thrown out of gear in answer to some individual prayer or petition. But this is bad science as well as poor faith.

It was once supposed that the solar system is so balanced that the loss of a grain of weight, or the slightest change of motion, would dislocate and destroy the whole system. It is a higher science, and not a lower, that has corrected that view, and that has since taught us that exact uniformity is by no means necessary to the stability of the system, but that oscillation and change are fully provided for in the original plan. “The uniformity of Nature,” it has been pointed out, “is in fact one of its lesser attributes. Its great

glory is in its wonderful adaptability . . . Shall we deny to the Creator the power (which human science has discovered in its dealings with the forces of nature) so to adjust the original mechanism of the universe that prayer, with its appropriate action, may directly modify that mechanism, as the child's thrust and his little hand can open a faucet and change the action of the great water-works miles away."

Now, as against the theory (we cannot call it anything else) of the uselessness of prayer, let us set the fact that those who use it can tell you of its efficacy. A grain of experience is worth tons of theory. It is the prayerless man, remember, who tells you that prayer is useless, that it can do no good. How can he possibly know anything about it. But when, to the man who does believe in prayer, you say, "How do you know it is any good?" he answers, "How do I know? I know it by my own experience of course. I have proved it—practically, not theoretically—over and over again."

Well, in this as in other matters, I would rather be guided by "the man on the spot"—the man who knows—the expert—and not by the mere theoriser, however ably he may be able to argue in favour of his theory. What is the use of all the scientists telling me, for instance, that the sun's

rays are really cold, and not warm, when I myself have been cheered and warmed by those rays times without number? It is no use any one telling me that prayer is vain, when I myself have proved its efficacy again and again.

Now the prayerless men and the scoffers at prayer are the people who are never tired of speaking about Nature's laws, and the uselessness of trying to change or modify those laws by prayer. To these we are tempted to say, "But, my friends, you are yourselves the very strongest contradiction of your own opinions. Here are you setting yourselves, with all your might, in opposition to a very primary law of man's nature. Why, if there is one law of man's being which is unmistakable, universal, it is *the instinct of prayer*. Go where you will you find it. Go back to the beginning of man's history and you find it. Go to any inhabited part of the globe and you find it. "You may find peoples," said an old Greek, "without cities, without arts, without theatres; but you can find no people without an altar and without a God."

The universality of prayer is a fact that must be faced. How do you account for it? For, remember, when you find a law, or custom, which is not merely local, but universal, you must face it and you must account for it. People the most

highly civilised pray; tribes the most savage pray also. Everywhere men pray.

And so the unavoidable inference is that it is unnatural *not* to pray. And that is why I affirm that the prayerless man is a contradiction and a negation. Such a man is not fulfilling his destiny. He is living an incomplete life. He is denying, ignoring,—and therefore starving—the highest part of his nature. The savage realises, in his imperfect way, the instinct that is in him; and in his dim groping way he strives to give expression to it. After all, he is truer to the law of his being than his civilised brother, who sneers and sets himself to stifle the instinct.

Ah! my brothers, the man who does that is not engaged in any noble endeavour or heroic task. To depart from the ideal, and to miss the destiny that God has intended for us, is only a sad and pitiable thing. To such a man there comes a time, too, when the instinct will not be stifled; when his helplessness comes home to him, when a cry for aid and pity is wrung from him, like that of the notorious Thistlewood, “O God! if there be a God; save my soul, if I have a soul!”

How different from the utterance of one who lives and rejoices in the glorious liberty of the

sons of God ; who realises the Fatherhood of God ; who shelters within the Everlasting Arms ; who says, "O God ! Thou art my God ; early will I seek Thee. . . . I will direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up."

Sermon XXV

THE SEA-LESS SHORE

REV. xxi. 1

And there was no more sea.

THE words “no more” are indicative of joy or sorrow, of hope or despair, according to the context in which you find them. In the one case they tell of freedom and release; in the other they speak of loss and anguish. It is in the former, the happier, larger sense alone, that St. John uses them in these passages in the Revelation, descriptive of the glories of the New Jerusalem.

A new world opens upon the Apostle’s gaze—a new world, for which the old creation makes room and to which it gives place, “for the former things are passed away.” And the characteristic feature of this new creation may be summed up in one word—Freedom! Freedom from everything that marred and spoilt the old world, and made

it so often a sad, weary, disappointing world to live in. That old world had been brought under the bondage of sin to corruption—the new creation is wholly freed from the tyranny of sin ; and the words “no more” describe the glorious freedom of this new and blessed state from anything approaching to disintegration, destruction, disappointment, loss. Thus we read, “And there was no more curse” ; and again, “And there shall be no more death.” “No more !” for the dominion of sin is for ever ended, and “the former things are passed away.”

But there is one feature of that new creation which not only puzzles us, but which we can hardly find it in our hearts to rejoice over. “I saw,” says the rapt Apostle, “a new heaven and a new earth . . . and there was no more sea.” “No more sea !” It is well-nigh impossible for us, descendants of the old sea-kings, dwellers in a sea-girt island, to imagine such a thing as a sea-less shore. All around us heaves and rolls the boundless sea—the silver streak of the Channel, the majesty of the broad Atlantic, the cold zone of the Arctic Ocean, the wind-swept waters of the wild North Sea. These natural features have set their impress upon the race ; have given a sturdiness to the national character ; have helped to make us what we are—a great sea power ! Our

ships are on the sea ; our stately battleships, the pride of the nation, the bulwarks of our land ; and the magnificent merchantmen which tell of our world-wide trade and commerce. What then, we wonder, will that new world be like in which there shall be " no more sea " ?

But that is not all. The sea is associated in our minds with so much of the joy, the holiday-time, of life. To the sea we have gone in search of those refreshing, health-giving breezes which build and brace up the lowered system. We can recall the long, happy, summer days spent within sound of the sea waves ; the calm, still nights when the moonlight has been upon the waters, and all the solemn mystery and glamour of the sea has entered into our souls. At such times it has whispered to us of the " ships that pass in the night," of the strange life-stories of men and women, voyagers over life's sea, who, some in storm and some in calm, have been borne away on its bosom to " the far eternal shore."

To us " the sea " has been synonymous with freedom and boundless space, reinvigoration and refreshment ; and it is with something like dismay as well as perplexity that we read the description of that " new heaven and new earth " in which the sea shall find no place.

But, indeed, the thought need not trouble or dis-

truss us. The sea is a part of God's own good creation. Its boundless expanse, its beauty, its majesty will not be wanting there ; but its terrors and its sadness (for these also belong to it in a world into which sin has entered) will have passed away for ever.

In St. John's description of the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the sea stands for all those terrible upheavals and convulsions predicted by our blessed Lord in connection with the end of the present dispensation, and the coming of the Son of Man to judgment ; when "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ; and upon earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring."

There, in that better state, nation shall not rise against nation, neither kingdom against kingdom ; and the end of wars, tumults, seditions, apprehensions, treacheries, is signified in the words, "there was no more sea."

But the sea may be taken also to symbolise certain states and conditions of this present life—sorrow, trouble, anxiety, doubt, fear—which will for ever have passed away, and for which, in God's new creation, no place will be found. Thus, the sea is the very type and symbol of

Change. How sudden and rapid are its changes ! How soon is its smiling, placid surface changed

into a seething, boiling mass of angry, raging waters ! Even so do the changes and chances of the world enter into our lives, turning as suddenly our laughter into mourning, our smiles into tears. Changed surroundings, changed affections, changed lives, changed hearts—these are the changes that make life sad—“ Change and decay in all around I see.”

Then, another characteristic of the sea is its *restlessness*. Not only in storm and cloud, but just as much in sunshine and in calm, it is “ the troubled sea whose waters cannot rest.” It heaves and falls unceasingly. Never, for one single moment from year to year, and from age to age, and from century to century, do the waves cease their eternal march and counter-march as the tide ebbs and flows. And so the sea is a type of the unrest of the world : the unrest of nations—suspicions, doubts, designs ; the unrest of hearts—unsatisfied desires, blighted hopes, longings which cannot be expressed ; bodily unrest—painful tossings, weary watchings, all the great unrest of which life is full.

Sea-swept shores, where shadows chase the sunshine,
Tides of trouble breaking o'er the breast ;
Life with death conflicting and contrasting,
Elsewhere, rest !

Bitter striving, and the glory won not,
Restless seeking, and the prize unfound ;
Vain aspiring, and the end attained not,
Crossed and not crowned !

Suns that set, and leave the land in darkness,
 Flowers that fade, and leave the valleys bare,
 Faiths that fail, and leave the life a desert,
 No rest there !

Wistful face, pressed against the window,
 Waiting hearts upon a far-off shore ;
 Wasted love, and life, and all life's labour,
 Evermore !

Again, the sea is ever associated in our minds with storms and shipwreck ; with stories of vessels that have foundered far away in the unknown depths ; with the sobs of the drowning, heard by God alone, and the wild “cry of some strong swimmer in his agony.” And thus the sea is a symbol of the storms of life—the storms which lay our hopes in the dust, which leave our homes desolate, and our lives wrecked and shattered.

Then, the sea is the great natural barrier between nation and nation ; it separates kingdom from kingdom, and people from people. It is the sea rolling between, shutting them off one from the other and barring free intercourse, that so often makes race suspicious of race and creed intolerant of creed ; that begets hostility, excitement, distrust and dislike.

There shall be “no more sea” means that, in that better state, all barriers will be for ever broken down. In the Holy City will be found all nations,

but no more nationalities ; all races, but no more exclusiveness ; all tongues, but no more confusion of tongues ; there, Jew and Gentile, Scythian, barbarian, bond and free, will be one in Him who is the God and Father of all.

“ No more sea ! ” The sea rolls between some of us and “ loved ones far away.” Our thoughts are even now, perhaps, with some dear one whose home is on the waters ; who is so much in our thoughts and anxious prayers in stormy weather, when the winds howl, and the clouds, tempest-driven, are scudding across the sky. We think of others who have crossed the sea, whose business has called them to make their homes in distant lands. How often we yearn for a sight of the dear faces, and the sound of well-loved, familiar voices. “ No more sea ” means no more separation to make the heart heavy and sad.

Then, who has not felt, even though one has never been able to express the feeling and put it into words, that strange *mystery* that belongs to the sea ? It seems to beckon us on to strange quests and curious enterprises. It whispers to us of unknown regions that lie beyond the far horizon. It has mighty secrets hidden away in its great depths and impenetrable recesses—strange creations, mighty worlds, fantastic shapes. It is for ever

whispering or singing some strange, glad song. We hear it with our ears, but its meaning is hidden from us, and we weary ourselves with asking, "What are the wild waves saying?"

And so the sea speaks to us of the mysteries and puzzles of this earthly life, in which we see "as in a glass, darkly"; in which there is so much that is, and must remain, unexplained, unfathomed, and unknown.

But then, in that day, the sea will give up its dead; dark secrets of many years will be revealed; all that the great, merciful sea has kept so long covered up and hidden away will lie open to the gaze. In God's new creation "the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain," and we shall know even as we are known.

The end of all mysteries, enigmas, puzzles, is expressed in the words "no more sea!" Now we know all the bitter meaning of sorrow and care, of doubt and fear, of separation and pain, of anguish and unrest. But after storms will come "a great calm."

For beyond all this a rest remaineth,
Even so—a rest beyond it all,
Where no pains assail, no partings sadden,
No tears fall.

Sermon XXVI

“THE FEAST OF HARVEST”

(Harvest Festival)

EXODUS xxiii. 15, 16

Thou shalt keep . . . the feast of harvest.

I DO not know any injunction peculiar to the Mosaic code which is more cheerfully accepted, or more readily complied with by English Church people to-day, than this one. As far as outward observance goes the Feast of Harvest is most religiously and scrupulously kept through the length and breadth of the land.

Many a man who not only would never dream of subscribing to the Levitical law, who would vigorously deny that that law is in any way binding upon Christians, but who with a light heart ignores the obligations of the Gospel also, is not only ready, but even eager, to vie with the veriest Jew in this matter, and to show himself a very

Hebrew of the Hebrews in keeping the Feast of Harvest.

We never have any difficulty about getting people to church for the Harvest Festival. Some, indeed who never enter a place of worship from year's end to year's end have been known to boast that they have attended every Harvest Thanksgiving service within reach in the space of a few weeks. This is not a matter for congratulation. But the fact remains that with thousands of people the Harvest Festival is the great religious event of the year.

It is impossible to view without uneasiness the fact that people who ignore the great Christian festivals, who dispute about and reject those fundamental doctrines of the Faith to which we make confession at Christmas and Easter, at Pentecost and Trinity, should find no difficulty about crowding to our Harvest Services. But the reason is as obvious as the fact is undeniable.

The Harvest Thanksgiving makes no demand upon their faith. I am not now speaking about that general acceptance of the goodness of the Creator, to which a mere Deist will cheerfully subscribe; but I am referring to those distinctive doctrines of the Catholic Church “which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health.”

The decorations, the music, the sensuous surroundings of the Harvest Festival ; the picturesque character of the entire service—these appeal readily enough to the eye and to the ear. The senses are wrought upon by these, and the mere sightseer finds himself able to take a share in the outward observance without any corresponding effort from the heart within.

Nor has this picturesque influence been without its effect upon the faithful also. Devout and earnest souls have come under that influence, and have been conscious of being, to a certain extent, carried away by it. Extravagances and follies, ritual and artistic (or non-artistic), have in many places marred the Harvest Thanksgiving services, to the real distress of sober, thoughtful people with a sense of the proportion and fitness of things. So much, indeed, has this been the case, that some parish priests have even seriously considered the advisability of altogether eliminating the Harvest Festival from the parochial calendar.

My brethren, you are thinking, no doubt, that this is a strange line of thought for a Harvest Thanksgiving sermon. But I am taking it deliberately ; first of all because I feel that the time has come for plain speaking on this matter, and because, in the second place, the Harvest Festival (unknown

in its present form to the English Church a hundred years ago) has got to be recognised.

It has come ; and it has come to stay. And I am glad of it, for it is meet and right that it should. I am quite sure we all feel that its omission now would be a distinct loss.

By all means let us regulate the commemoration ; let us keep it within due bounds ; let us have a due regard for the proportion of things ; let the festival take its proper place among the festivals of the year. It must not be allowed to overshadow the much greater festivals of Christmas, and Easter, and Whitsuntide. Let us beware of extravagances and follies in the observance of it. But, having thus safeguarded it, let us recognise the fact that if the duty of keeping the Feast of Harvest was binding upon the Jew, it is just as binding upon the Christian, seeing that Jew and Christian alike are dependent upon the same God who opens His hand and fills all things living with plenteousness.

The merciful Creator, to whom the psalmist looked up and cried, “The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O God, and Thou givest them their meat in due season,” is the Creator upon whom the eyes of the whole earth—waiting year by year for the time appointed by the Lord of the Harvest to put in the sickle and reap—are fixed in pathetic helplessness

to-day. Jew and Christian alike share the fulfilment of the gracious promise that “while the earth remaineth seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”

Therefore let the Christian recognise that it is his duty as well as his privilege to “keep the Feast of Harvest”; and so soberly, thankfully, with hearts full of gratitude to Him who giveth all, let us keep our Harvest Thanksgivings.

I am quite sure that these are days in which we could ill afford to give up such services as these. Quite apart from the many solemn and beautiful thoughts suggested by seedtime and harvest; quite apart from the many life lessons to be gleaned from the harvest fields—lessons which it must do us all good seriously to lay to heart—there is the precious underlying principle of a great public recognition and acknowledgement of God’s omnipotence, of man’s littleness and helplessness.

We live in times, I say, when we can ill afford to abolish this great yearly witness to those truths. For who has not observed the steadily growing tendency among people of all classes quietly to ignore the government of the universe by the Almighty, and an equally quiet assumption of the sovereignty

of man in the world—except in such cases as he is graciously pleased to ascribe the ordering of this event or that to the blind workings of Chance.

It has been given to men in these days to work what would have been called miracles a hundred years ago; to bring the very elements into their service; to chain them to their purpose; to make them subservient to their will. And it is wonderful how very little success (consequent upon light and knowledge which God has bestowed upon them) suffices to make men giddy, to turn their heads, to make them regard themselves as only just less than omnipotent.

But while the earth remaineth seedtime and harvest will remain, to mock men's self-sufficiency, to rebuke their pride, to teach them that they are at the best but pensioners (and very feeble, helpless pensioners at that) upon God's bounty, and dependent upon God's will.

Dew and sunshine, cold and heat, wind and rain, all those forces of Nature upon which the final harvest depends, are, and always will be, beyond man's control. If God withhold His hand, if He turn away His Face—we perish!

Now, as we keep this Feast of Harvest let that one thought be uppermost in our minds. Is it

uppermost now? Was it uppermost in your minds, my brethren, as you came to church for your Harvest Festival to-day? Well, would you have come—would you have come in such numbers—had you known that you were coming to a service shorn of all those accessories which you look for as a matter of course at the Harvest Thanksgiving? No decorations, no special music, no picturesque surroundings at all—but just, say, half an hour to be spent in church humbly upon your knees, thanking God for all His goodness and His love? Honestly now, would you have come simply to praise and bless God, Who has stretched out His hand and blessed you so freely and so abundantly? If you would not have come thus, then it means, does it not, that you have come to please yourselves; to have your senses gratified? It does not require much effort or self-denial to do that. It means that while God has bestowed so much upon you, you are here for your part to offer to the Lord your God that which costs you nothing!

It may be that it never occurred to you to regard the matter thus. You have been merely thoughtless. But then thoughtlessness is no excuse for thanklessness. It is not too late to think of the meaning of the service even now. It is not too late to confess our ingratitude; to make a true

thanksgiving; to go out hence feeling that, after all, we have not been here as mere sightseers, but that we have, in a very true and real sense, kept the Feast of Harvest.

Sermon XXVII

“THE HOLY ESTATE OF MATRIMONY”

(For a Wedding)

DEARLY BELOVED, you have this day, in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, plighted your troth either to other ; and in the joyous and blessed union of hearts, symbolised by the joining of hands, you now go forth as man and wife, to share each other's joys and sorrows along life's way. You go forth (and our earnest, loving prayers go with you) to be, from this day forward, that mutual help, comfort, and strength either to other, which the Lord God willed that husband and wife should ever be, when—having created man, He pronounced that it was “not good that the man should be alone,” and so created woman to be “an helpmeet for him.”

You have solemnly, prayerfully, reverently considered the step you have this day taken ; and upon

which we have invoked the blessing of the Triune God—a blessing which He, for His part, never fails to bestow upon the union of those who with all their hearts do seek him. You have realised the sanctity of the holy estate upon which you have entered ; and the solemn compact in which is signified no less a mystery than that perfect union which is betwixt Christ and His Church. You know that your plighted troth is for life, and unto death ; yea, beyond it ; to be continued and perfected by God, and with God, there, within the veil !

You, my sister, I am sure, have opened your heart to hear all that God says to you in these solemn, happy moments of your life. You will be a helpmeet indeed to him whom God gives you this day.

And you, my brother (I dare to say it), know how to appreciate the priceless worth of a good woman's love ; the inestimable value of a true woman's heart. You will shield and guard the life that is made one with your own life to-day. You will love, honour, and cherish her with a good man's love ; with a true man's chivalrous, tender devotion.

God's sun has shone out upon you, kneeling side by side, before God's altar to-day. We pray that it may symbolise the ever-abiding Presence of the

202 “The Holy Estate of Matrimony”

Son of Righteousness in that new home in God's world which you go forth to make this day. May the sun of God's love and mercy ever rest upon that home, to cheer and brighten it. For even in the days in which “the clouds roll up the sky” there is brightness in that home to which Christ is bidden; in which husband and wife pray Him ever to abide, an honoured, welcome Guest.

God give you both such a home. And God grant you long to live together in it, in that perfect confidence, loyal trust, and mutual forbearance which makes wedded life beautiful and glad.

And God give you grace to journey along life's way, heart answering to heart, in the life of prayer, and praise, and sacrament, which shall daily fit and prepare you for the perfect life with Him, in your eternal Home above.

Sermon XXVIII

“CONCERNING THEM WHICH ARE ASLEEP”

(Funeral)

I THESS. iv. 13

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning
them which are asleep.

My words to-day, like your own thoughts, my brethren, must be words “concerning them which are asleep.” “The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God ; and there shall no torment touch them.” Let us see what the Christian Religion has to teach us about those souls in God’s own safe keeping.

We are about to lay to its long rest, in the new-made grave which even now awaits it, the tired body of one who, having served God in his genera-

204 "Concerning Them which are Asleep"

tion, has fallen on sleep. Soon we shall commit that body to the ground, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." But, even as we do so, I would direct your thoughts rather to the soul, which, for a season tabernacled in that earthly house—the soul upon which death has had no power; which has passed within the veil; and which, delivered from the miseries of this sinful world, is even now living, learning, rejoicing, worshipping, in the nearer Presence of its Saviour and its God.

Yes, strange—anomalous even—as it may seem, here, in the presence of the dead; amid all the surroundings which speak of the solemn mystery which we call death; and in the midst of the very service for the burial of the dead, the thoughts I would put before you are thoughts not of death, but of life! For we are Christian people; we believe that Jesus died and rose again; therefore the Christian hope is ours; and we feel that we are here for the reverent laying to its well-earned rest the body of our brother who "is not dead, but sleepeth."

“Concerning Them which are Asleep” 205

“Earth to earth, and dust to dust,”
Calmly now the words we say,
Leaving him to sleep, in trust,
Till the Resurrection Day.
Father, in Thy gracious keeping
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping.

But it is our brother's *body* only that sleeps. We are sure of that. He, the brave, pure, patient soul whom we loved so well; with whom we took sweet counsel; on whose sympathy we could always count; who shared our joys and our sorrows; he, with his own strong personality, and in the beauty of character which God loved and worked upon and developed here below; he, with all that was good, and true, and lovable abiding in him, still lives—is living now. We love him still; he loves us still. The sympathy, the tender thought, the loving care which he had for us in this life—these have not ceased—they are all there still. He does not forget us; he never will forget. He remembers us, and he prays for us. We hear his voice no longer, for awhile. We see him no more. But God sees and hears. And that voice that was consistently raised on the side of all that was right, and pure, and of good report; that life which was lived in God, and spent for Him, is life fuller, gladder, intenser now; lived, as it is, nearer the

206 “Concerning Them which are Asleep”

Throne. That voice is raised on our behalf, and not raised in vain, in the courts of the Paradise of God.

And so our thoughts turn naturally (as we thus think of him whom God has called thither) to Paradise, whither he is gone—to Paradise, its life, its rest, its work, its worship. What is the state of the souls that have entered there? What are they doing for God? What is God doing with them?

Paradise is the place of waiting—the intermediate state in which souls which have departed out of this world await the resurrection of their bodies, and the final Judgment of the last Great Day. It was to Paradise that the Saviour's Soul went forth in the interval between His Death on the cross and His glorious Resurrection. In His words of comfort spoken to the penitent outlaw He speaks of that state plainly and definitely: “To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.” St. Peter speaks of the same place of waiting souls as the abode of “the spirits in prison”—*i.e.*, in safe keeping. “Jesus Christ,” he says, “being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, [in the Revised Version it is “quickened *in* the Spirit”] . . . went and preached unto the spirits

“Concerning Them which are Asleep” 207

in prison.” In the Creed we say “He descended into Hell,” or Hades. Remember, we are speaking there of the place of departed souls—Paradise—not of the place of torment.

All we know, then, is this—that Paradise is the place of waiting souls. We know that it is a safe place, and that Jesus is there, and that those who are gone are there with Him.

Then what, in the next place, is the state of the souls in Paradise. It is a state of growth, of enlargement, of progress. In this life the soul is greatly clogged and hampered by the burden of the flesh, its appetites, its passions, its weaknesses. Separated from the flesh, which weighed it down, the soul goes on “from strength to strength”; it is capable of greater progress, with increased power of comprehension and improvement. God is therefore perfecting the souls in Paradise. Brethren, God’s work in us does not cease at death. If it did, death would be stronger than God. No! He “who hath begun a good work” in us, the Apostle tells us, “will perform it”—how long? Till death? No—“*until the day of Jesus Christ.*” No good that is in us can be lost. The smallest germ of goodness will be developed and perfected; and God is thus perfecting the souls in the unseen

208 “Concerning Them which are Asleep”

world. He is teaching them lessons which on earth they were incapable of learning. They have more light, more knowledge ; they are penetrating great mysteries of God ; mysteries which it is His pleasure to reveal, and their delight to learn. And, finally, what are they, the blessed ones, doing for God. They are doing, as they did here, His Will. They are working for Him. Their work on earth is done. When that work was finished God called them away ; and there, in His nearer Presence, there is still work for them to do. They are still fellow-workers with God. There are souls to be helped, weaker brethren to be strengthened ; and this accounts for the removal from our midst of many who were sorely needed (as it seemed to us) here below. We wondered why they were taken away. Was it not because God had other work for them to do, there, within the veil.

One thing I am sure they are doing. They are *praying* for us, and they know better how to pray and what to ask—for they know more of God, more of His love, more of His great plan for the whole world and the whole human race than they ever knew before.

May we pray for them ? Of course we may.

“Concerning Them which are Asleep” 209

Why not? It is mere prejudice and a groundless fear that forbid us to mention the faithful departed in our prayers. Why should we not pray for them? Do you say that they have no more need of our prayers? That is to make bodily wants greater than spiritual needs. Their earthly life is over; freedom from sickness, weariness, pain, disappointment—these things we need ask for them no more. But the soul's needs are not at an end. And God knows just what these are; and He knows how to supply them. While they were with you, you prayed “God bless them!” Well, at least, say “God bless them, our dear ones, still!” God will know how to bless—how to answer that prayer.

And so we leave them with God. And for us, who are left behind for a little season, the world grows empty, and dark, and sad. They have gone to Him. We are still waiting His call; and it is “weary waiting here.” But there is always the great reunion to be looked forward to. Meanwhile, we will never forget them; and be sure they will never forget us; and over us all, the living and the dead alike, there is God! And so we will wait, and watch, and pray; and “be the day weary, or never so long,” the waiting hours will run out at last. The sun will go down,

210 "Concerning Them which are Asleep"

the night will have come ; but it will be only the night that precedes the morning of the Everlasting Day.

The shadows lengthen, night draws nigh,
As fades the glory from the west ;
To Thee with longing hearts we cry
For those dear souls we love the best ;
O Father, grant them Rest and Light,
In that fair land which knows no night.

For them we watch, as they for us,
And Thou art watching over all,
And while Thy love is round us thus,
We wait to hear Thy evening call,
With them to share Thy Rest and Light,
In that fair land which knows no night.

LAUS DEO

AMEN

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252Q

Murphy, J.B.C.

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The mills of God and other

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